# Steering Shrinkage?

## Actor constellations and regeneration governance in accommodating Shrinkage.

Vom Fachbereich Raum- und Umweltplanung der Rheinland-Pfälzischen Technischen Universität Kaiserslautern-Landau zur Verleihung des akademischen Grades Doktor rerum politicarum (Dr. rer. pol.) genehmigte Dissertation

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REVIVING SHRINKING CITIES
innovative paths and perspectives towards livability for shrinking cities in Europe

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# Summary

Experimenting in the urban realm has become a very attractive and influential trend within the last years. Real world laboratories, living labs and other formats have been popping up in cities worldwide with the goal to reevaluate and rethink today's complex challenges, how cities are governed and which methods can help in improving urban futures. Experiments of such nature often include increased attention on the collaborative practices between municipalities, citizens, academia and the private sector and focus on transdisciplinarity. Shrinking cities are no exception in this regard. They have been argued to be niches for innovative approaches and playgrounds for trying out new methods, despite the plethora of challenges that such places have to accommodate. Bridging the fields of urban experimentation and shrinkage however, has not been a prominent topic on the research agenda yet. This thesis closes this gap by looking at the two cases, Heerlen, the Netherlands and Halle (Saale), Germany, through the lens of experimental governance. Since shrinkage is strongly affecting resources of local governments in these two cities, they depend on healthy relationships with different actors. How these local governments communicate, interact and work with citizens and civic initiatives in the long-term, how accessible they are and how daring they are to change processes and attitudes, can be defining factors for the accommodation of shrinkage. The results of the research point to thought-provoking processes. Both cases show very interesting trajectories and enduring effects of governance changes that were predominantly results of public actor's dare to experiment. Experimentation in this regard looks different in the two cases: in Halle (Saale), turning a blind eye on the informal and sometimes illegal practices of civic initiatives, but also increased personal interest of civil servants in working with such groups, have been significant factors. In the case of Heerlen, the implementation of an independent "brooker" who facilitated contact and communication between citizens, civic initiatives and public servants, led to successful changes in governing vacant land.

Examining the shrinking cities of Halle (Saale) and Heerlen through the lens of experimental governance further sheds new light on the topic of institutional capacity and capacity building to experiment in shrinking cities. The thesis concludes with the findings that some shrinking cities can be birthplaces of innovation, regardless of lower public budgets, selective outmigration, a weaker economy or declining trust in local governments. The reasons for this are manifold, however they can point to a changing view on shrinking cities that is far away from the once predominant negative and pessimistic picture.

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# PART A: INTRODUCTION

Within a globalizing world and cities constantly striving for growth as the only way to progress and as their dominant paradigm, the realities in some urban agglomerations do not match up with these notions. In fact, “shrinkage” is a “hot topic” (Elzerman and Bontje, 2015) in various disciplines concerned with space, such as planning, geography, urban studies, urban sociology, political science or environmental science (ibid.). However, the phenomenon of shrinking cities is nothing new or uncommon (Haase et al., 2014; Bernt, 2009), has been a part of urban developments ever since, and is predicted to remain as a relevant topic in the future too (Pallagst, 2010; Wiechmann and Bontje, 2015). A rather vast range of descriptions have been used to describe what is going on in “shrinking cities”, “declining cities”, “post-industrial cities”, “vanishing cities”, cities facing “urban transformation”, “demographic decline” or “change”. Shrinking cities as a field of research have certainly found their niche in the academic realm, but that does not mean that the topic is yet fully understood (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012; e.g. Audirac et al., 2012). This chapter serves as an introduction to this doctoral research. It will lay out how this thesis enlarges the research field, scrutinize existing research gaps and explain how this research aims to close them. Finally, an overview of the structure of this doctoral thesis will be demonstrated. It starts with setting the scene for the challenges of shrinkage and the existing research gap. Further it approaches complexity sciences and explains why and how it can be a useful framework for studying shrinking cities.

# 1 SETTING THE SCENE: SHRINKAGE AND THE LOCAL SCALE

The current century has been marked by sets of challenges. These include rising for example global inequality (Sassen, 2014), growing power of network societies (Castells, 2013) and processes of social exclusion and displacement resulting from, amongst others, complex financial instruments, neoliberal politics or austerity measures (Peck, 2012) leading to what Harvey refers to as "spatial fix" (Harvey, 2000, p. 122), Castells (2000) might address as "black holes" in the space of flows, Bernt and Rink (2010, p. 678) describe as "backyards of globalization" or Sassen calls "new logics of expulsion" (Sassen, 2014, p. 1). The latter manifest themselves in many ways; Vacant and abandoned neighborhoods, population loss and economic decline characterize about 40% of all large cities (meaning a population above 200,000) according to recent studies on shrinking cities (Mykhnenko and Turok, 2008). Similarly, Castells talks about places being "by-passed by the new geography of networks" (Castells, 2002, p. 551). He refers to the fact that some cities were more successful than others in the transformation process from industrial to post-industrial, also known as deindustrialization. Within a globalizing world, some of these places lost their position in the dominating global networks of economies, cultures, investments, information and people. This dichotomy is reflected by urban agglomerations which are gaining importance due to the constant increase of population and economy on the one hand, and others experiencing the mirroring trend such as declining populations, more prominent demographic changes or difficulties of economic stability, triggering many different problems and challenges; but also, opportunities. As a field of research, studies on urban shrinkage emphasize the complexity of this phenomenon that occurs due to a multitude of intertwined factors and processes on different levels of scale. Shrinkage is an urban development that is predicted to remain a relevant topic in European areas (Pallagst, 2010; Wiechmann and Bontje, 2015), particularly because the forecasts point to serious demographic challenges in the future (Großmann et al., 2013); some even use the wording of shrinkage being an "unavoidable trajectory" (Ročak, 2019, p. 715). The literature on shrinking cities is broad and large in number today, however scholars do call for further research that addresses more specific issues and adds to theorization. This chapter serves as an introduction to the following state of the art in PART C: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS, where the body of scholarly literature on the topic of shrinking cities is summarized and reflected. This chapter makes clear how shrinkage is understood and used in this dissertation, which is an important step for defining the case study selection criteria, which will be explained in PART B: RESEARCH DESIGN.

## 1.1 ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON SHRINKING CITIES OVER TIME

Research on shrinking cities has a longer tradition than might seem obvious. This is due to the fact that the studied phenomenon has not been called or understood as "shrinkage" universally. More so, different terminology such as "decline, decay, blight, abandonment, disurbanization, urban crisis and demographic change" (Haase et al., 2014, p. 1519), or "vanishing cities" (Pascal, 1987), "post-industrial cities" (Hall, 1997), or "urban transformation" (Buzar et al., 2005) have dominated the scholarship on urban population loss. Under these terms, literature on shrinkage can be dated back to the mid-20$^{th}$ century (Haase et al., 2014), and an increase in academic contributions and interest in the topic can be seen since the turn of the century (Bernt et al., 2014; Haase et al., 2017). Accompanied by several international projects and networks, such as "Shrinking Cities International Research Network" SCiRN, founded in 2004 at the Institute of Urban and Regional Development at the University of California, Berkeley; the COST-Action CIRES; the FP 7 project "Shrink Smart", the academic discourse quickly gained momentum and a plethora of research started to emerge. In fact, shrinkage has become a highly researched topic on research agendas in recent years (see for example Beauregard, 2009; Haase et al., 2014; Pallagst, K. et al. (Eds.), 2009; Pallagst, 2010; Oswalt, 2006; Turok and Mykhnenko, 2007) as this phenomenon poses challenges in many regards and questions "traditional" ways of policy making (Radzimski, 2016).

Although academic research in shrinking cities has proliferated and advanced significantly in recent years, the definition of a shrinking city remains difficult. This is made clear in the many attempts to propose one definition for the process. Several scholars agree that one exact definition is almost not existent (Bernt et al., 2014; Mallach, 2017; Pallagst, 2010) and many attempts to explain shrinkage rely too strongly on population loss as the indicator (Audirac, 2018; Großmann et al., 2013; Sousa and Pinho, 2015; Haase et al., 2016b; Hartt, 2019; Coppola, 2019). This in turn can lead to a simplification of the underlying complexities. Shrinkage is sometimes used synonymously with population decline or loss (Sousa and Pinho, 2015, p. 14). However, this should not mean that population is not a valid indicator to reflect upon or identify shrinkage. As Großmann et al. (2013, p. 221) highlight, it is the "tip of the iceberg" when discussing the complexity of shrinkage. Other scholars (Bernt et al., 2014; Haase et al., 2017) mention that there is not a shrinking process, but a plethora of "shrinkages", pointing to the deep importance of contextual factors of each shrinkage process. Prior to this finding, urban shrinkage has been mostly discussed from a political-economic point of view. In this regard, Molotch's (1976) theory of a city as a growth machine strongly shaped the academic realm. Another well-established theory is the life-cycle model of urban development, showing periods of growth, stagnation as well as shrinkage (see for example van den Berg et al., 1982b). The life-cycle model

explains how people move out of cities to the urban hinterland due to the negative aspects of dense agglomerations, such as overcrowding or decreasing quality of the housing stop. Van den Berg et al. (1982b) add another phase, where people tend to move away from agglomerations of the city and the hinterland to small and medium-sized cities in the broader hinterland (Haase et al., 2014). Summarizing, these explanations depict how growth is, almost inevitably, followed by decline, making shrinkage a common occurrence. However, after the turn of the century, this viewpoint was replaced by more complex and contextual questions. The aim was to understand how shrinkage manifest itself in different spheres and how cities approach shrinkage (or not), to scrutinize which are the crucial causes and effects of shrinkage and increasingly, to disentangle interdependent variables related to shrinkage. Some of the more recent studies that have been published within the past few decades, discuss the effects of population decline on the economic sector (Hartt and Warkentin, 2017; Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012), on the environment (Schilling and Logan, 2008; Haase, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2015) on the social realm (Ročak et al., 2016b, 2016a; Ročak, 2019; Schemschat, 2021), on governance (Willinger, 2014; Ubels et al., 2019a; Ubels et al., 2019b; Ubels et al., 2022; Stryjakiewicz, T. & Jaroszewska, E., 2016; Hartt, 2020), on the built infrastructure, especially the housing sector (Cocks and Couch, 2012; Hoekstra et al., 2020; Gu et al., 2019), recently also about the effects on the cultural sector (Matyushkina, 2021). Other theorizing attempts at urban shrinkage turn to globalization, such as Martinez-Fernandez et al. (2012). “Modern” urban shrinkage is explained by the rising significance of global cities (Sassen, 2014) due to increasing globalization and uneven accumulation of human, financial and knowledge capital. Shrinking cities are therefore explained as socio-spatial manifestations of globalization. Other reasons or explanations for shrinkage can be found in economic structural changes, such as deindustrialization and the change of political systems, such as the fall of the Iron Curtain. Further, the effects of deindustrialization are connected and sometimes overlapped by the effects of globalization and the economic competitiveness on the world market (Camarda et al., 2015).

However, as some authors acknowledge, shrinkage remains misunderstood in many respects (e.g. Audirac et al., 2012; Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012). This might be due to several reasons: first, a common definition of shrinking cities is still missing and contested (Bernt et al., 2014) in addition to a varied and inconsistent terminology (Haase et al., 2017) and limitations of translatability of the term into different languages. Second, the phenomenon remains under-theorized or lacks a coherent theory and conceptualization (Audirac, 2018; Haase et al., 2017). Third, the different national discourses on shrinkage represent the various types and manifestations embedded in national contexts and political frameworks (Haase et al., 2017; Haase et al., 2014).

## 1.2 LOCAL MANIFESTATIONS OF SHRINKAGE

Looking at the geographies of shrinkage, it becomes apparent that the phenomenon is not a solely local manifestation, but more so, is embedded within the regional realm. In fact, there are growing regions with embedded shrinking cities and vice versa. Scholars therefore call for regional approaches to steering shrinkage. However, recently the attention has been brought to the local and individual scale, increasingly with a focus on citizens (see for example Ročak et al., 2016a; Ročak, 2019; Ubels et al., 2019b; Ubels et al., 2022) and their perception of shrinkage as well as their involvement in regeneration strategies and projects. Indeed, it is the individual resident who experiences shrinkage on a daily basis, and some scholars highlight the need to scrutinize the needs of the local population (see Dax and Fischer, 2018). Additionally, "local realities" (Leick and Lang, 2018) as well as welfare regimes play a crucial role in how shrinkage can be accommodated. Therefore, context matters to a great extent when researching shrinking cities on a local scale (Wolff and Wiechmann, 2018; Großmann et al., 2013). The number of cities across Europe that are experiencing shrinkage is comparably high; Myknenko & Turok (2008) show that it is approximately 40% of large cities with a population of over 200.000 residents and even 75% in eastern Europe. Governing shrinkage on the local scale has become increasingly difficult, as very often those cities are shaped by outmigration of the young and educated, loss of quality of life, vacancy, public budget deficits and cuts, underuse of social infrastructure as well as general deterioration and neglect of infrastructures. Much so, as Myrdal (1957) phrased it by "cumulative causation", the negative development in shrinking areas tends to spiral downwards once it has started. Additionally, shrinkage triggers deep transformations and can enhance uncertainties in policy and decision-making.

The future of shrinking cities is highly unpredictable, and research shows various scenarios of how shrinkage can unfold. But, as Boelens and de Roo (2014)stress, process-oriented approaches that go beyond the well-established technocratic planning approaches have a greater ability to adapt to changing and uncertain contexts. Further, the process of adjusting to changing circumstances is very much a process that happens within cities (Rauws, 2017). Such local adjustments can include civic initiatives, entrepreneurial initiatives or actions led by local authorities. Collaborations between those stakeholders, therefore, turn out to be crucial and can trigger changes at a higher administrative level (Roo, 2010a, p. 27). Due to the circumstances of shrinkage, citizens and their involvement in urban development processes are a particularly interesting research topic and an unexploited resource (Matyushkina, 2021). This can be the result of several issues. Firstly, motivating residents to get involved in precarious and pessimistic times is a major challenge (Ročak, 2019). Secondly, there can be varying expectations for the future of the city between public officials and residents (Haase et al.,

2012a). Thirdly, the question of to what extent citizens can and should be involved, as well as how much responsibility can be transferred, is an ongoing challenge.

Citizens can play an important role in the trajectory of shrinkage and Hospers (2014, p. 1508) emphasizes that "civic engagement is Europe's most important urban shrinkage challenge", pointing to the complexity of involving residents in such areas. Based on existing literature, Figure 1 (p. 18) explains where the potential for civic involvement can be found. These stem mainly from public budget cuts and deficits and, therefore, staff shortages to plan accordingly and maintain vacant areas. On the other hand, vacancy itself, as well as underuse and neglect of land and infrastructures, opens up

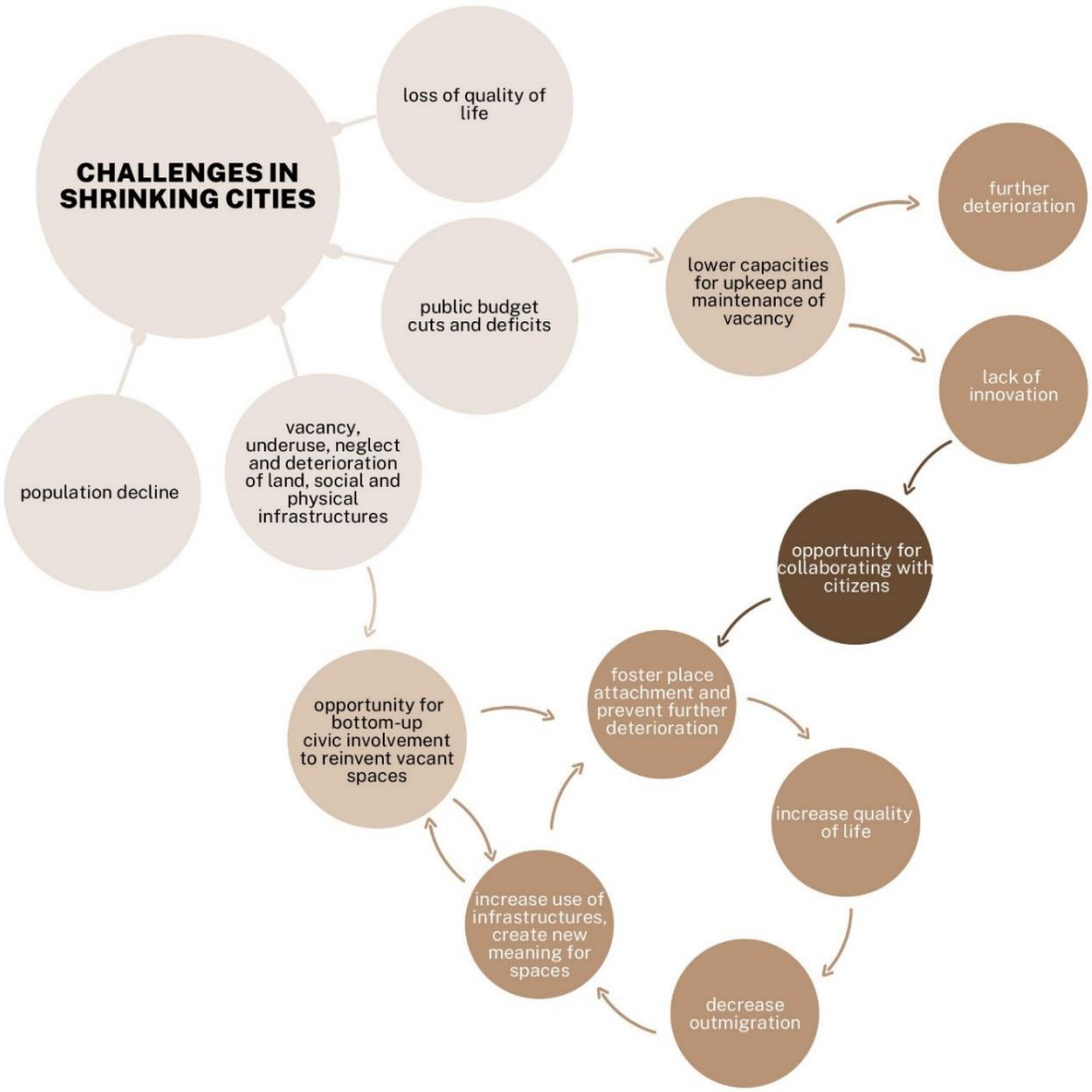


Figure 1. Challenges in Shrinking Cities and the potentials of civic involvement. Author's own.

possibilities for bottom-up civic involvement. Involving citizens in the regeneration of shrinking areas can foster place attachment (Ročak, 2019) and subsequently, increase the quality of life. In return, securing quality of life in shrinking areas can cause fewer people to move out. Following this, the use of previously underused infrastructures can be increased, and spaces can gain new meaning again.

Still, little is written about how civic initiatives emerge and persist in such turbulent times and what their relationship with the city administration looks like. Turning to citizens in times of crisis to step in for the provision of public services is a heatedly debated and contested topic. Critical papers underline that "Citizen participation […] is not something that can be dictated from above. If public officials want citizens to care for their community, they must enable them to do so and reformulate public responsibilities." (Hospers, 2014, p. 1519) The topic deserves exploration due to the critical circumstances of reduced financial capacities of city administrations as well as the need for any action to foster a certain degree of quality of life and potentially strengthen place attachment. Another viewpoint indicates the potentials of exploitation of citizens as gap fillers in times of crisis and austerity. Nevertheless, shrinkage is a "complex urban governance process" (Hospers, 2014, p. 1519) and although the self-governing capacities of residents in some depopulating regions are noticeable (Ubels et al., 2019b), this is not the case in most shrinking areas. Research shows that forms of collaborative governance where both citizens and city governments are involved can be productive (Ubels et al., 2019a). Existing research gaps proof that how citizens and public officials collaborate, communicate and how their relationships are established and how they develop over time have not been part of the research agenda of shrinking cities to a great extent. The following chapter introduces the topic of experimental governance in shrinking cities and explains why it is used as a framework for this thesis.

# 2 SHRINKAGE AND EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Governance has been an important cornerstone of academic research for many decades. It appeared with heightened vigor on research agendas during the 1980s and became a "buzzword" "which can mean anything or nothing" quickly (Jessop, 1998, p. 30). It is therefore unavoidable to define how the term is understood in the specific context. For this research, two concepts of governance are taken as a starting point for the definition. On the one hand, the German concept of *Steuerung* and Mayntz's interpretation within systems-theory is interesting: "governance refers to the deliberate action of bringing an autonomous system as an object of governance from one state into another: whether to stabilize it, redirect it, or transform it" (Mayntz, 1993, pp. 11–12). On the other hand, as already highlighted by Cocks & Couch (2012), Rhodes' (1997) interpretation of governance refers to a process of change, a changed order or changed methods by which a realm is governed. The point of departure, therefore, is that governance refers to a form of transformation that takes place as a process. This short introduction is the basis on which the term "governance" is defined for further elaborations in PART C: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS.

Governing shrinking cities has been in the eye of scholars for many years. In 2013 already, Großmann et al. (2013) highlighted that in order to understand different trajectories of the phenomenon, the "black box" (Großmann et al., 2013, p. 223) of governance needs to be discussed first. One important step here is to turn to the actors, scrutinize their relationships and collaborations. In short, it is about the Who, the What, with Whom and Why (ibid.). Audirac (2018) summarizes that the plethora of vacancies in shrinking cities, such as underused land or deteriorated spaces, have attracted various actors such as creatives, entrepreneurs, city administrations and planners. This in turn can lead to effective forms of network governance, however is also quite contested in terms of gentrification due to deliberately increasing market potential of such underused spaces. Nevertheless, empty spaces can offer potential for reinvention or for giving new meaning to such areas (Dubeaux and Cunningham-Sabot, 2018; Haase et al., 2016b; Haase et al., 2012b) and tend to fall in the hands of citizens. This is mainly the case when city governments still pursue a growth and solution-driven approach to govern shrinkage (Reverda et al., 2018). The concept of "Raumpioniere" (Faber and Oswalt, 2013) describes citizens who, in times of crises, become co-producers of public services and public space (ibid.). In line with this, Hospers (2014) points to the benefits of civic engagement in shrinking cities, which can manifest itself in strengthening place attachment and therefore motivate residents to not move away. Additionally, citizens are brought together by engaging in shaping their

neighborhoods and in return, this can foster social cohesion. In a similar regard, research on depopulating points to the fact, that empowerment of citizens can be crucial to maintain quality of life, the provision of services, as well as stop further outmigration if access to social, human and financial capital and material resources can be guaranteed (Fischer and McKee, 2017).

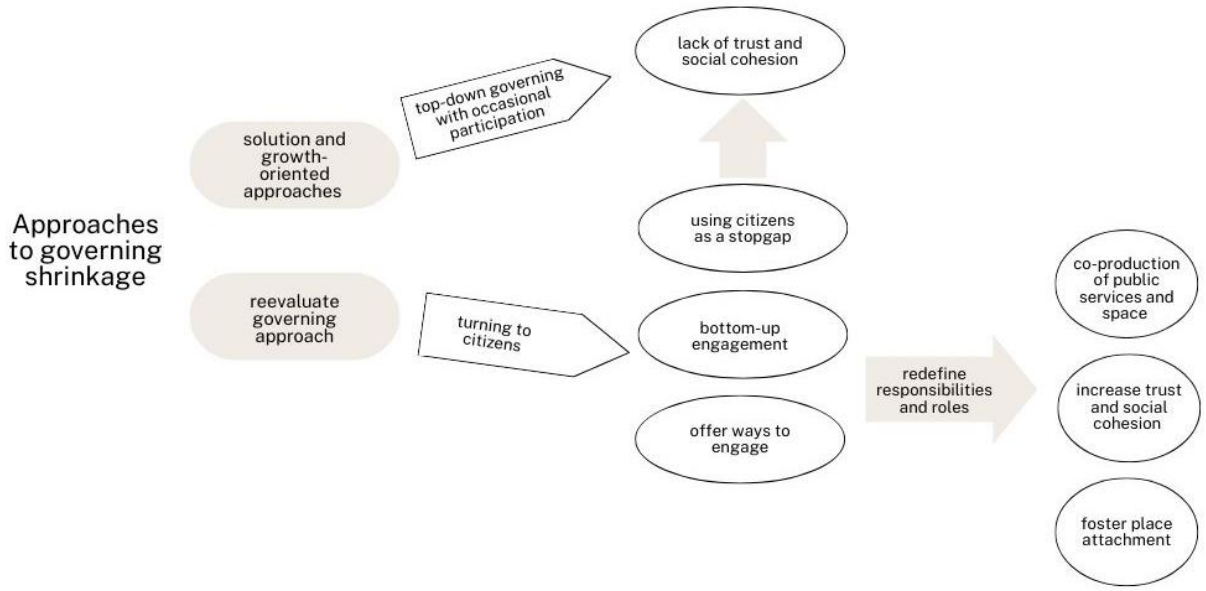


Figure 2. Approaches to govern shrinkage. Author's own.

Involving citizens in governing shrinkage is easier said than done. In fact, it "must go hand in hand with public measures to enable community participation", as Hospers (2014) concludes, because otherwise civic involvement risks being (mis)used as a stopgap to replace the vanishing public services (Neu, 2011). Figure 2 outlines and roughly summarizes, based on existing literature, the potential of choosing to re-evaluate the existing governance mode and taking the role of citizens seriously, which ultimately can lead to co-producing certain services as well as public space. In turn, this can increase the trust of citizens towards the municipality and vice versa, as well as strengthen social cohesion and place attachment. On the other hand, sticking to well-established, growth and solution-oriented approaches that might consider citizens in a traditional participatory way, as well as using citizens as a stop gap to step in in times of crises, can further decrease trust and does not have any positive effect on social cohesion. On the contrary, such an approach puts citizens in a position to deliver services despite not being trained for it (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000), raising concerns about neoliberal agendas in times of shrinkage.

In line with the broadly accepted notion that citizens and city administrations need to work together, this research dives into the concept of experimental governance. Ideas of governance beyond the State (Swyngedouw, 2005) are taken into account, however, the crisis of shrinkage is not simultaneously associated with the "death of the state" - in the words of Swyngedouw (2005, p. 2002). More so, deliberative and collaborative approaches to governance (see Healey, 2004; Hajer, M. A. & Wagenaar, H., 2003; Innes and Booher, 2003) provide insights that help understand the changes in governing shrinkage. It is undoubtedly a complex matter of how administrations can work with citizens (Ubels et al., 2022). Experiments in governance require a redefinition of roles, responsibilities and limits. Ubels et al. (2022, p. 10) stress, that there is "no overall recipe" for ways to include citizens. The difficulty additionally rises in highly marginalized areas. However, scholars talk about "political vacuum" (Meijer and Syssner, 2017), "policy windows" (Kingdon, 1984; Bernt et al., 2014) or "windows of opportunity" (Bernt, 2009; Coppola, 2019; Hospers, 2014) that tend to open up in times of crisis, providing increased opportunity for change.

Additionally, cities have since been declared the place where (social) innovation happens. In this regard, shrinking cities are hypothesized to be a long-neglected niche for societal change. In fact, many of the "negative" consequences of shrinkage provide physical and mental space for experimenting. With regard to civic involvement, this research takes a closer look at experimental governance in order to understand how, why and by whom such changes in governance are initiated, how they evolve and what the long-term perspectives of potential re-arrangements are. Experiments in urban development practices and subsequently also experimental governance have gained increasing momentum since it has been realized that the current problem's that our planet is facing are increasingly complex and cannot offer the much sought after sustainable solutions (Eneqvist and Karvonen, 2021). Cities have been declared the prime location for trying out new approaches in this regard (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013). More and more, urban living labs and similar actions are entering the public sphere and municipalities have become key actors in such practices causing the governance approaches to undergo serious changes. In fact, experimental governance is increasingly becoming a strategy in some cities, as experiments are implemented in strategic ways. The pioneering scholars in this regard, Bulkeley and Castán Broto (2013) call it "governance by experiment". Experiments of various forms are also being carried out in shrinking cities.

Summarizing, three main reasons or drivers of experimental governance can be defined: first, the plethora of vacant space allows for the spreading of actions without the constraint of the resource "space". Second, the critical circumstances of a limited public budget seek alternative and cost-efficient approaches. Third, through experimenting together with citizens, trust between the participating parties can be strengthened.

# 3 USING COMPLEXITY SCIENCES AS A LENS

Shrinkage can be considered an inherently wicked problem. Several aspects of the phenomenon point to this interpretation. Wicked problems (Rittel and Webber, 1973) are always unique making a universal explanation difficult. There is no general solution to the problem; rather, the solution needs to be tailored to the specific context. Additionally, wicked problems are never truly solved. More so, they are symptoms of other problems. (Hartmann, 2012) Further, they are generally too complex to be solved by rationalist and positivist planning approaches and paradigms and rather call for experiments and innovation, "clumsy" solutions (Verweij et al., 2006) and challenge of traditional practices. These aspects very much fit the challenges that shrinkage comes with. Firstly, a universal explanation for shrinkage cannot be captured, as it is highly dependent on the contextual factors such as history of economic and political development, social factors, welfare regimes and local embeddedness. Secondly, academic discussion and empirical evidence have shown that traditional planning approaches were not particularly successful in accommodating shrinkage. Instead, the call for innovative ideas for shrinking cities is still ongoing and experimental approaches might be the way to get there.

Wicked problems have been approached by complexity-based approaches to planning since their first introduction by Rittel and Webber (1973). Today's planning paradigms are argued to still largely operate in a system that constantly strives for growth of the economy and the built environment, and is dominated by techno- and sociocratic approaches (Boelens and Roo, 2014) and rigid governance structures. In times of crisis, such as shrinkage can be perceived as, these governance structures are challenged and their functioning as such is put to the test. Since the 1980s, innovative planning ideas have entered the field and are increasingly moving away from planning as a technical science to more discursive and collaborative governance structures (see e.g. Forester, 1993; Healey, 1997; Innes, 1995). Authors such as Healey (2004, 2015), Hajer and Wagenaar (2003) as well as Innes and Booher (2004, 2010) have particularly brought forward interpretative and deliberative notions in planning (research). Similarly, since the 1960s, the concept of strategic spatial planning has made its way into some countries and has been revisited and reexamined (Albrechts, 2013, 2004) to be useful in combining strategic visions with short-term actions for complex and wicked problems; realizing, that a shift in the style planning is necessary, particularly creating conditions for stakeholders to become more active and involved in the process (Albrechts, 2004). Post-structuralist approaches to urban development play a fundamental role in this regard. Such kind of planning does not try to reduce complexity, but embraces and works with it in a creative and open manner (Boelens and Roo, 2014). Boelens and de

Roo (2014) define five key characteristic of post-structuralist approaches: (i) overcoming restrictive barriers or limitations of governments, (ii) using the micro-scale as point of departure while still considering macro-influences that might trigger or accelerate certain processes, (iii) acknowledging the many ways of new assemblages and networks within the specific institutional settings, (iv) highlighting how leading actors at different scales can co-evolve more horizontally and (v) analyzing how actants adjust and evolve within the (changing) settings. These notions are framing open and undefined becoming in planning processes which is the key approach to work with complex problems and unknown or uncertain futures. The question of how processes should evolve is therefore not defined and can unfold in non-linear and unexpected ways (ibid.). The shift towards "becoming" puts more emphasis on the process of continuous production, reproduction and alteration of existing patterns.

Changes and deep transformations such as shrinkage, are undoubtedly driving uncertainties in all areas of society including policy and decision making (van Bueren, 2003). In the case of shrinkage, economic decline and the gradual processes of change in population and demography can be a reason for uncertainties especially with regard to designing and planning for the future of these cities (Rauws, 2017). Even empirical evidence does not always provide certainty for decision and policy makers (Pawson et al., 2011) highlighting further the impossibility of prediction. In the shrinking context, a broad variety of trajectories of shrinkage shows how uncertain future developments are, let alone the prediction of stabilization or even re-growth (Dubeaux and Cunningham-Sabot, 2018; Großmann et al., 2013; Grossmann and Haase, 2016). Uncertainties arise due to unexpected and rapid events (natural disasters, political or social upheavals) or more gradual processes of change which contribute to overarching transformations of an area or society. The need to deal with uncertainties is especially important when planning for longer time periods (Zandvoort et al., 2019), which is inherent to the current planning practice. Some scholars in the field of uncertainty turn to complexity in order to make sense of those (see for example De Roo et al., 2012; Portugali, 2011; Batty, 2013). Mainly, it is the characteristic of complexity theory which rejects determinism and predictability (Cilliers, 2002) and emphasizes the importance of adaptive capacity and undefined becoming. Portugali (2006) argues that cities show the key behavioral tendencies of complex adaptive systems when responding to transformations such as demographic changes, economic trends, technological innovations. The concept of emergence is central to complexity theory and provides better understanding of how and why trajectories emerge and evolve. In particular, complexity theory highlights multi causality and rejects the notion of single causality. Rather, changes arise from ongoing interactions of the parts of a system and from their relations with other systems and their parts.

The notions of "becoming" and "emergence" both underline the understanding of complex systems as systems that are always in flux, never static but constantly evolving from one phase to another (Wagenaar, 2007). Complex systems do not reach an equilibrium, but remain just outside one which allows for change and progress. Such instability is argued to be necessary for any development (Roo et al., 2016; Roo, 2010b). Cilliers (2002, p. 3) even defines equilibrium as "another word for death". Additionally, as Prigogine & Stengers (1984) argue, a system that transforms constantly, never returns to the initial state. This is due to the changing circumstances that prohibit a reconstruction of the original form. However, although the openness of future outcomes remains key, complex systems to not transform randomly. The role of actor's as parts of the systems remains important, and their perspectives and actions provide feedback and learning to the system, steering them and interacting with other parts of the system. This way, complex systems turn into adaptive complex systems (ibid.).

Notions of complexity have been also translated to the neighborhood level (see for example Rauws, 2017; Wagenaar, 2007), arguing that relying on experts to understand emergent properties is limited because "expert knowledge is primarily aimed at the understanding (and alleged control) of the separate parts of the system (e.g., members of ethnic minorities, food suppliers, school dropouts, employers, etc.)" (Wagenaar, 2007, p. 24). Such hierarchical and top-down governmental approaches in decision-making and policy implementation can fail to effectively address challenges in urban development and particularly, in fragile states such as shrinkage. More so, Rauws (2017) argues that a cities' process of adaptation, transformation and adjustment to changing circumstances very much results from processes that happen within. Such local changes can include actions by citizens or initiatives by entrepreneurs or local authorities and collaborations between those groups. These interventions can trigger changes at a higher administrative level. Literature on governance in shrinking cities underlines similarly, that facing shrinkage is a "complex urban governance process" (Hospers, 2014, p. 1514). Rocak et al. (2016b) further stress that collaborative efforts between civil society and public institutions, formal and informal actors are crucial to ensure a sustainable future in shrinking cities. This is in line with Hartmann's (2012) suggestion, where he argues that clumsiness makes sure that voices are heard and different rationalities are taken into account. In this regard, participation is a common method to manage the various expectations of involved actors (ibid.). Similarly, Wagenaar (2007, p. 28) argues that democratic deliberation is a "nonreductionist way of solving complex problems". In this regard, complexity sciences challenge the traditional, well-established reductionist approaches, whereby it shifts the view from a specific part to the system as a whole. It rather looks at networks and elements, their interactions and how they produce behavior (Cairney, 2012).

Summarizing, following Cilliers (2002), Prigogine (1997), Prigogine & Stengers (1984) the key notions of complexity are:

1. They consist of a large number of elements which interact with each other. The interaction is a dynamic one and can be in the form of material interaction or immaterial, in the form of knowledge exchange.
2. The interactions between the elements are non-linear. Non-linearity accounts for the so-called "butterfly effect", meaning that a small action can have large results – and vice versa.
3. Complex systems are unpredictable. Even if we know all initial conditions, we still do not know how the future will evolve.
4. Feedback loops within the system provide positive or negative feedback, which act either stimulating and enhancing or inhibiting. Both forms of feedback are necessary in order to adjust activities and processes.
5. Complex systems are open systems, which means they interact with their environment and with other systems. Further, the borders of a system are difficult to define.
6. Complex systems are always in flux and never remain (too long) in equilibrium.
7. They have a past which is responsible for their current behavior.

Taking all these findings into account, this research combines notions of complexity sciences and experimental governance and applies them as a lens to shrinking cities. This thesis therefore contributes to the emerging strand of shrinking cities literature that turns to complexity sciences and post-structuralist or relational ontologies to shed a different light in order to understand the phenomenon and explain it further (Hoekveld, 2012; e.g. Hartt, 2018b; Ubels et al., 2019a; Haase et al., 2016b). Complexity sciences shape this thesis not only as a theoretical background, but also in the overall research design and positioning. One of the key points in complex thinking is the understanding of the world in a state of continuous change and interaction (Rauws, 2017; Gert de Roo, Jean Hillier and Joris Van Wezemael, 2016; Boelens and Roo, 2014). This means that neighborhoods, cities, regions and other spatial configurations develop through various processes, and more so, the interrelation of those processes. Further, change is understood as a result of a plethora of mechanism, not one single one (Grossmann and Haase, 2016). Therefore, the ongoing interaction between elements of a system as well as interrelationships between different systems are responsible for whatever happens in society. These key principles are fundamental to understand change in urban development processes. Adopting such a view for shrinking cities can open new potentials of grasping how we can

accommodate the changes that took place due to shrinkage. The research design is therefore inevitably shaped by complexity sciences and focuses on tracing processes of change and elements of the systems in the form of actors. This will be further explained in PART B: RESEARCH DESIGN.

# 4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis comprises five main parts which are discussing the topic of shrinkage in general and specifically the processes of experimental governance in selected case study areas. Part A introduces the reader to the basics of the assorted concepts and theories. It sets the scene for the complexity of shrinkage and gives an overview of why looking into the relations and processes between formal and informal actors can give options for accommodating shrinkage.

It then proceeds with Part B, the research design. Here, the researcher's interest as well as the problem statement are explained. This leads to explaining the conceptual methods used in this thesis: an analytical step, a perspectival approach and a processual view. These form the bridge to the later formulated research questions.

Part C consists of comprehensive discussions of the state of the art of shrinking cities and the theory of experimental governance. The theoretical framework chapter summarizes the findings from the discussion by looking at innovative and experimental governance approaches within complex settings, namely shrinkage.

Finally, Part D displays the empirical findings of the two analyzed cases in a descriptive manner. Lastly, in Part E those findings are mirrored against existing research findings and discussed in relation to the assorted theories and how they contribute to new knowledge creation in the shrinking cities literature. Concluding, recommendations for further research as well as the practical applicability of the results are formulated.

# PART B: RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design for this thesis is embedded in the underlying ontology of complexity sciences and relational approaches to conducting urban research. In light of the city as a complex system and the challenge of shrinkage, paired with differences in how problems are perceived differently by various members of society, this thesis takes a close look on the process and dynamics of change in governing shrinking cities. In an analytical step, the concept of experimental governance in shrinking cities. A perspectival approach analyzes the elements involved in governance change, meaning actors, policies, legal frameworks and their relations. Lastly, the results of the analysis are portrayed in a processual view in order to trace the process of change in governance arrangements. These three approaches aid in moving away from researching the object of planning itself, such as the physical urban environment in shrinking cities, to the processes and relations between actors and the dynamics that produce specific physical outcomes.

# 5 RESEARCH INTEREST AND OBJECTIVE

This research stems from both an academic interest in contributing to the closure of an existing gap in current literature as well as a personal interest in the research topic. The latter stems from a passion for and believe in self-organization, participation, civic action and shaping the urban from the "bottom-up". Particularly, the question of why these processes seem to trigger fundamental change in certain cities more than in others has been a key point of my interest. However, shrinking cities offer another layer of complexity to this question, as the "critical mass" – the creatives, the young and educated – is leaving behind cities that lose population and seems to be attracted by the vibrant, prosperous and growing cities. Literature shows, that in fact strong place attachment as well as informal participation are dominant in some shrinking cities (Ročak, 2019). Further, as Ubels et al. (2019b) conclude, self-governing capacity of residents in some depopulating cities is noticeable (however, can change over time due to changing governance structures). The question of "who" and "why" are therefore crucial points of departure for the general research interest in the topic of this thesis. The combination of those also make up the problem statement, which opens up questions about how change in governance in shrinking cities is initiated, how it evolves and whether these changes contribute to a long-term adaptation of governance, or if increased civic involvement is a stop-gap for municipal governments in shrinking cities.

## 5.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In light of scholarly recommendations for shrinking cities to adapt governance (see for example Hospers, 2013; Pallagst et al., 2009; Radzimski, 2016; Wiechmann and Bontje, 2015; Hospers, 2014) as well as the acknowledgement that participation and collaborative efforts are crucial to meet the challenges of shrinkage (Hospers, 2014) and the growing visibility of planning efforts being taken by non-state actors after a long time invisibility in the planning profession and scholarship (Boelens and Roo, 2014), the guiding question for this research is as follows:

***In light of changes that are applied to local and informal governance processes in times of shrinkage, how do such experiments contribute to accommodate challenges in shrinking cities?***

With this question, several dimensions are addressed: 1) scale: local/ shrinking cities; 2) process: informal governance processes; 3) drive for change: accommodation; 4) temporal factor: experiments. These dimensions form the basis of the detailed research questions presented.

The first question is of descriptive nature and aims to identify involved actors and portray the network of actors who are involved in the selected case studies. It further goes into detail on how the actors are interacting and communicating and what types of relationships they have established. Answering this question as a first step is crucial in order to understand who is involved and what their scope of action is. Pinpointing the actors and their level of action builds on the theoretical knowledge on vertical and horizontal shifts of power and responsibility in governance (see Ward and McNicholas, 1998). Vertically, this question depicts on which policy-basis actors on the municipal level are responsible for dealing with shrinkage in general. Horizontally, it will explore the involvement of the various public and private, formal and informal actors in experimental governance. This question therefore explores vertical and horizontal dynamics within governance arrangements and investigates what role informality plays in establishing relationships. The first sub-question is therefore formulated as follows:

***RQ 1: Who are the actors involved in experimental governance processes and what type of relationships have they established?***

Sub-research question two is formulated in an explanatory manner that aims at laying out the process of change with regard to governance. The focal point is to understand whether change in governance in shrinking cities is only initiated by municipal actors, or if civic initiatives that existed prior can be a triggering factor to move towards more experimental forms, too. This question also goes into detail in exploring the dynamic process of governance change with relation to time and certain challenges of shrinkage. This is important for the comparative aspect of this research and aims to understand the culture of governance and participation or civic involvement in the two cases. It will determine which factors, or combination of factors, are key to move towards more experimental forms of governance. The second sub-question is:

***RQ 2: How are forms of experimental governance emerging in shrinking cities and what factors are crucial for their further evolvement?***

The final sub-question is again of explanatory nature and aims to examine the long-lasting effects of changes in governance that occurred in times of shrinkage. After exploring how certain civic initiatives gain importance in governance arrangements, this research explores what steps are being taken to ensure longevity of established relations and how civic initiatives can remain as stakeholder

in the respective governance arrangement. As the two selected case studies vary in their shrinkage process, one having overcome and stabilized after a long period of population loss and the other still experiencing shrinkage, this is a challenging aspect of the comparative approach. Hence, direct comparison is not possible here. However, in terms of learning from other examples, the time-lag offers important insights. The third sub-question therefore is formulated as follows:

***RQ 3: In which ways can experimental forms of governance be sustained long-term?***

Approaching the analysis by answering the three sub-questions first provides a thorough and in-depth guide to answering the overarching research question. The analytical chapters are therefore structured in a way that accommodates this approach.

# 6 ANALYTICAL, PERSPECTIVAL, PROCESSUAL CONCEPTUAL METHODS

Three conceptual and interrelated approaches are being adopted in this research: an analytical step, a perspectival approach and a processual view. These approaches reflect the step by step process of the study. Firstly, the analytical perspective is used in order to break down the concept of experimental governance in shrinking cities in light of a complexity-sciences perspective. Secondly, the perspectival approach shows what the elements – the actors, policies and legal frameworks – and their relationships are. It further ensures a view at governance from different perspectives of the actor groups and makes it possible to explore the differences of understandings and opinions of involved actors or parties. Thirdly, the processual approach is used to trace the process of change in governance arrangements. In detail, it investigates which actors came into play at what point in the process, who was involved in decision-making and how long-term effects are being ensured or not. The following chapters explain those three approaches in detail, as they guide the structure of the thesis. Following this, the concrete methods, namely in-depth qualitative interviews and document analysis are explained and why those have been chosen. Lastly, this research draws its conclusions from a comparative analysis of two cases. Therefore, the last chapter explains in detail the dependent, independent and intervening variables and puts particular focus on the challenge of time-delayed inductive and deductive process tracing.

## 6.1 ANALYTICAL STEP

As manifold as the characteristics and consequences of shrinkage are, the responses to this process can and should vary from case to case. However, putting policies for shrinkage on the agenda of governmental action is not easy. Sometimes it requires an intense political process or bargaining for certain issues to reach political agendas. In this aspect, actor's interests, power relations, as well as institutional settings and the local context play key roles (Bernt et al., 2014). Several authors suggest that shrinkage requires new governance concepts to adequately address the topic (e.g. Hospers, 2013; Pallagst et al., 2009; Radzimski, 2016; Wiechmann and Bontje, 2015) and highlight that shrinkage is a "complex urban governance process" (Hospers, 2014, p. 1514). The terms "shrinkage", "governance" and "complexity" are contested and loaded. Therefore, it is of great importance to first go into detail on the ontology of those terms in a first, analytical step (see Figure 3).

This research adopts a post-structuralist and relational view on shrinking cities and the governance thereof that roots in complexity sciences. Exploring cities through such a lens almost immediately criticizes, albeit not very explicitly, "classical" theories of urbanism such as the well-known ones developed by Thünen, Weber, Christaller or Lösch as they portray cities as closed systems and in a state of equilibrium (Portugali, 2016). Complexity theories have a view on cities that centers around openness, non-equilibrium and chaos and offer alternative and different views on problems that were not adequately addressed by traditional expertise. Planning to a large extent has been practiced based on technical, deterministic and instrumental approaches (Graham and Healey, 1999), the technical rationale, and a toolbox of instrument used to generate plans and predictions for future spatial development – an approach that was deeply rooted in certainty over future developments (Roo, 2010a; Roo, 2016; Schön, 1983). However, with rapidly growing uncertainties shaping urban development and the later realized unpredictability of certain events, such as shrinkage, population loss, economic downturn or demographic shifts in society, dynamic approach can offer a wider scope of potential ways to address such challenges. Particularly, approaches in spatial planning that focus on relations between different stakeholder but also between stakeholders and their ever changing environment (Graham and Healey, 1999) have been adopted by a rather small amount of scholars to deal with shrinking cities. Hence, the first chapters of this thesis will not only review the existing literature on shrinking cities, but adopt a complexity-sciences and post-structural lens which sets the overall tone of this research. Similarly, although this thesis will not review the extent of literature that exists on this topic, some chapters are dedicated to governance in a complex perspective.

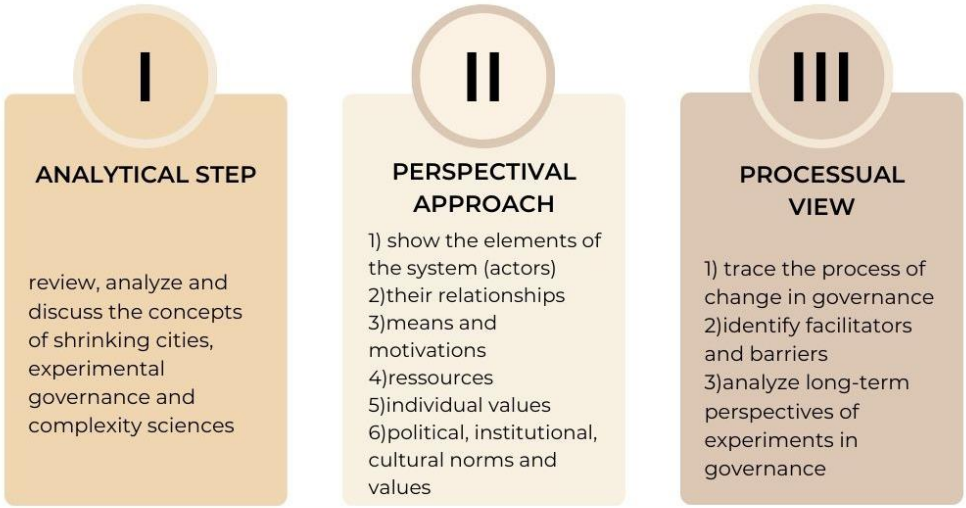


Figure 3. Analytical Framework. Author's own.

The aim of the analytical approach is to broaden the understanding of shrinking cities. Although the narrative is slowly changing and moving away from the notion that shrinkage and population loss are not desirable, actions still rather remain in a countering attitude. This does not mean that complexity sciences offer a "solution" to the "problem". Rather, it acknowledges that certain developments are not to be fixed in order to return to the desired state, which in face of shrinkage would constitute growth.

## 6.2 PERSPECTIVAL APPROACH

In general, four strategies can be distinguished that summarize all the different forms of approaches to confront shrinkage (or not), mainly notices in Europe. Verwest (2011, p. 67) for example differentiates "do nothing/policy stability" versus "take action/policy change" and Pallagst et al. (2017, p. 17) distinguish "active" from "passive" strategies, whereby active strategies include "expansive", "maintenance" strategies as well as "planning for decline". Pallagst et al. (2017) combine these strategies with perceptions of shrinkage which can vary from ignoring to accepting shrinkage. Hospers (2014, p. 1511) determines the following strategies: "trivializing", "countering", "accepting" and "utilizing" shrinkage. In this research I am focusing on shrinking cities where some form of action, such as policy change, acceptance or utilization of this process has taken place, in order to shed light on the complexity of governance or the change thereof. By using governance as a theoretical background and acknowledging the growing importance and effect of non-state actors and especially civil society in urban development, this thesis draws attention to active citizenship in shrinking cities. Responding to shrinkage has become a task of many parties involved, such as local governments, non-profit organizations, artists, entrepreneurs, architects, planners and civil society (Audirac, 2018). Whether this is an advantage and seriously can trigger long-term changes in governance will be discussed with regard to the collected data in this research. However, we can certainly observe new forms of networks and collaborations being developed and highlighted in times of shrinkage – a shift in governance arrangements as part of a "taking action" strategy. For this approach, I will go in depth by leaning on Yanow's (2000) interpretive analysis, which means analyzing how specific involved actors interpret and make sense of their environment, how they understand certain happenings and what their position in such processes is. With this approach an emphasis is being put on human action and actor's intentions. However, it goes beyond the "why" question and scrutinizes the are multiple interpretations of certain "artifacts" depending on the individual – or community – values and beliefs (Yanow, 2000, 5; 20-21). Hence, to apply a contextualized research and portray how and why actors communicate and interact

the way they do, special attention is being paid on different interpretations and views on shrinkage and increased civic involvement in times of population loss.

In short, the aim of the perspectival approach is not only to trace involved actors in the chosen case study, but more importantly analyze and reflect on the relations between those actors, the underlying policies and legal frameworks that made such a change in governance possible. By focusing on the perspectives on the actors, this research shows how different actors perceive not only shrinkage, but also their involvement in governing this process. This in turn helps understanding if, how and why shrinkage and/or participation and active citizenship are perceived in multiple ways.

## 6.3 PROCESSUAL VIEW

By defining governance as the decision-making process, this approach scrutinizes the time-perspective of changing governance arrangements. It goes into detail by tracing when and how specific actors initiated ideas or processes and how relations between involved actors commenced, advanced and finally how actors become long-term publicly acknowledged and institutionalized actors. The processual approach is the key pillar of this research, as it explains how active citizens build relationships with municipalities and vice versa. By looking into specific (ongoing) case studies, this research is able to break down the process of change in detail and shed light on the dynamic interactions that shape governance. This is particularly important for building an argument and conclusion regarding how new forms of governance are emerging in shrinking cities. In this perspective, not only relevant policies and guiding frameworks for shrinkage and participation are crucial, but more importantly, the underlying cultural values of citizens and bureaucratic obstacles or incentives are of interest to determine why and how certain cities manage to incorporate more experimental forms of governance in times of shrinkage. This is in line with very recent research conducted on rural areas in the Netherlands (see Ubels et al., 2019a).

Hence, the aim of the processual approach is to review the process of emergence and change of existing governance arrangements. By determining when specific actors initiated projects or when municipalities decided to reach out to citizens, and how the dynamics of the relations proceeded long-term, this research argues that there are temporary as well as more long-term, sustainable shifts that address the structural character of the existing governance arrangements. Defining the dynamics or the interaction as the actual object of research is also in line with approaches to researching complex dynamics (see for example Buijs et al., 2009, p. 51) and calls of scholars in the shrinking cities literature to shift the unit of analysis (Bernt, 2016; Berglund, 2020). To move the emphasis away from the object

of planning itself (the physical urban environment) to the processes and relations between actors is called the relational turn (Massey, 1999; Wohl, 2018). By adopting this approach, the scope of the research is limited to the interactions and dynamics within modes of governance and not on the whole governance regime.

# 7 METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This research is conducted in a qualitative and comparative manner. By putting emphasis on the process of governance change and traces of active citizenship, the selection of case studies was limited and resulted in two case study cities. Further, due to the specific research objective and questions, a qualitative in-depth approach was chosen and scientifically more appropriate than a quantitative approach would have been in this case. The research is problem driven (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and looks for deeper understanding of the complex phenomenon of shrinkage and in-depth case study research is seen as a necessary step in order to grasp the nuanced manifestations of the cases. Through exploring the cases in a comparative manner, questions about how similar concepts are applied in different local and national contexts or, what results the application of a similar method has in precisely those contexts, can be answered. The role of local, regional and national differences in planning, policy making and cultural and social aspects is underlined.

## 7.1 QUALITATIVE MULTIPLE CASE STUDY RESEARCH AND THE 'COMPARATIVE GESTURE'

### *THE COMPARATIVE APPROACH IN URBAN RESEARCH: ADVANTAGES AND CRITIQUES*

The comparative approach is a particularly popular method in multiple-case study design today. After two decades, comparative studies have experienced a dynamic again in the 1960s and have since then evolved to a standard practice in urban research; Several authors mention a come-back of comparative urbanism in this regard (Lees, 2012; McFarlane, 2010; Nijman, 2007). Part of the reasons for this renaissance is claimed to be the discourse around globalization, connecting economic and social activities as well as governance-structures of various cities through enhanced and simplified modes of communication (Robinson, 2011; Nijman, 2007). However, comparative urban research has also evolved from a rather narrow and rigid view to accepting the fact that "true" comparison is indeed not always possible. Challenges start with methodologically rigorous case selections based on superficial similarities which lead to researches calling for a "comparative gesture" (Robinson, 2011, p. 19) and lowering the expectations of a strict comparison. Rather, we need to pay attention to "context and temporality" (Lees, 2012), especially when aiming to conduct comparative research. Here, Bernt

(2016) argues that with the increase of difference in structures and specificities of cities, a potential comparison becomes less relevant as well. Especially, if the comparison is based on numbers and other statistical thresholds. Scholars argue that the contextualizing factors such as cultural, institutional, demographic and geographical criteria (see also Bernt et al., 2014) vary to a large extent which makes rigorous comparison not possible. It rather requires a very detailed consideration and highlighting of those contextual differences (Bennett, 2004).

There is an obvious ambivalence that needs to be addressed and argued. The advantages of a comparative approach of multiple case study are clear: learning opportunities, addition of contextual factors to generalized statements, pointing out new variables or hypotheses and so on (Bennett, 2004, p. 19). Cross-national comparative research in particular can contribute to bridge and fill certain existing gaps or biases (Haase et al., 2017). The comparative approach has effects on case study selection, demanding that the choice of case studies should be based on similar features or context variables, also known as the "most similar method" (Lijphart, 1975; Seawright and Gerring, 2008). Hence, scholars argue that comparison increasingly loses its validity the more differences contextual structures and factors are (Bernt, 2016). The second form of choosing cases for comparison, the "most different method" looks at cases that are similar in the causal variable and the outcome (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

There are indeed limits to comparative urbanism which have to be addressed in order to highlight the limits of this research and qualitative comparative case study research in general. Some of the doubts considering comparison center around theoretical and methodological questions, that need to be sorted out and addressed adequately in order to not fall back to universalism and the related question of generalization. Although this is particularly important when conducting comparative research on areas from very different regional and national contexts, this notion needs to be considered for the selection of cases within the same sphere, too. McFarlane (2010, p. 727) points out that "there is certainly a tendency in strands of urban planning to seek out models and apply them in different contexts (…)" underlining the risk of transferring strategies between various countries or cities, which is limited due to context related circumstances of cultural, socio-economic, political or institutional nature (see also Haase et al., 2016a).

## *COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF URBAN GOVERNANCE*

This research applies a comparative gesture to two different urban governance processes and their change in times of shrinkage. Literature on comparing urban governance has a long tradition and

the theoretical basis for this varies quite a lot. Some of these theoretical groundings include rational choice theory (Gurr et al., 1987), which has however only seldom been applied for comparative analyses of urban governance; regime theory (DiGaetano and Klemanski, John, S., 1993; Harding, 1994), which has gained significance due to its definition of "regimes" whereby informal arrangements between public and private actors are investigated as crucial for joined decision-making. Both of these approaches are contested and scholars argue about their applicability. This research follows DiGaetano (2003) for the comparative analysis and is based on three levels of analysis: structure, culture and rational. Structure sets the scene of each case study. It analyzes the parameters of governance, meaning, this level gives an overview of governing arrangements on the national, regional and local level, demographic structures, political environment, bureaucratic structures and historical events, and so on. On the culture-level, this research highlights the differences between the two chosen case studies. Although both of the cities are defined as shrinking cities, there are major differences, particularly in path dependency, in the meaning of active citizenship in civil society, in the severity of population loss and related challenges but also planning cultures. (DiGaetano and Strom, 2003) Cultural sensitivity is also highlighted by Booth (2011) based on Fainstein's (2001) call in order to properly being able to understand the "subjective environment" of actors. The last point which addresses the rational level goes hand in hand with the interpretive approach mentioned above. Therefore, on this level a focus is being put on agency and the reasons for individual's actions and how this triggers institutional change. (DiGaetano and Strom, 2003)

## *EMBEDDED MULTIPLE CASE STUDY RESEARCH*

The method of case study research is an established, essential and often applied method in the field of planning, governance and policy research (Buijs et al., 2009; Yin, 2003). It is argued that it can be particularly useful to gain detailed and rich information on a specific, and even sensitive topic (Zandvoort et al., 2019). Case study research can have multiple forms and different levels of depth.

For this research, an embedded multiple case study research design with a very small sample of two case studies is chosen. It is believed that two in-depth case studies are able to offer sufficient insight for answering the research questions. Moreover, the role of active citizenship in changing modes of governance is a topic without clear boundaries, as already the definitions of those two terms are blurry and very context-dependent. Hence, the case study is a rather logical choice for this research. It follows a multiple case study approach, as it has been argued that such a design provides more conclusive than single-case design (Yin, 2014, p. 57). More so, a case-based research design is oftentimes the preferred strategy when the focus is to answer "how" or "why" questions. Specifically,

when there is no control or influence over events or certain behaviors that are being investigated (ibid. 2014, p. 11). Yin (2014, p. 19) summarizes the four applications of case studies as follows: explaining links in real-life contexts that cannot be described or picked up through surveys; describing the respective situation and the context; illustrating specific topics; and enlightening specific situations that are not clear or have a plethora of outcomes.

The focal point of this research is the change in governance arrangements over time, with shrinkage being the particular time-frame of interest. The nature of this topic would allow for a single-case embedded design, however, the multiple-case embedded design (Yin, 2014, p. 50) has been chosen. The rationale for this type of research design has its reason in the fact that firstly, the potential sample size for this research is small, as active citizenship is a niche topic in shrinking cities. Secondly, the choice of two case studies has been done in a particular manner: the first case study is in the process of finding ways to institutionalize what started as a bottom-up way of developing vacant lots by citizens. The second one on the other hand, has already managed to succeed in this process, as the an informally started organization that aimed at pointing out the potential of vacant spaces, has become an acknowledged partner in urban development.

Case study research works well when the goal of the researcher is to bring to the front a rich understanding of specific events, experiences of actors, and conclusions or lessens that can be deducted from the case. This research does not claim to produce generalizable empirical knowledge about how governance can potentially change with regard to increased civic actions. However, it provides very contextualized and thorough knowledge about how and why civic involvement increases in times of shrinkage and how important the nature of interactions between involved parties is in order to formalize and acknowledge bottom-up organizations and initiatives. Hence, this particular research is interested in finding out the specific conditions that lead to or hinder outcomes and the mechanisms through which certain goals are achieved.

## 7.2 DATA COLLECTION

After the case study selection has been completed, each case is being approached individually and in hindsight. This has a few benefits as looking back in time and tracing what has already happened and emerged gives the researcher opportunities to reflect on already established decisions.

### *DOCUMENT ANALYSIS*

Analyses of relevant documents represent the first stage of the empirical work after the case study selection is completed. However, the chronical order of starting with document and policy analysis before conducting interviews, does not reflect a prioritization over the data generated from individual citizens and other involved actors (see also Sandercock, 1998). Rather, it is used to gain insight into relevant frameworks and structures that can be related to within the expert interviews.

Technically, policy analysis is a part of the wider term “document analysis”. Nonetheless, in this research documents are defined as more general, but also specific documents which do not fall in the category of policies or planning-related documents. Hence, the sample for the document analysis includes documents related to participation, calls for proposals, funding schemes, contracts, newsletters, proposals, websites, reports (each if applicable). On the other hand, the sample for policy analysis consists of documents related to shrinkage, such as urban development plans, neighborhood development plans, renewal programs, landmark regulations and so on. They offer the possibility to understand the specific political framework in which the individual unit of analysis is embedded. Since this research tries to understand of the links between policies and the decision-making processes of actors at the local level, policy analysis is crucial. As Hermans and Thissen (2009: 808) emphasize, it is the fusion of understanding the political framework and the study of the specific actors within the policy making realm that can aid the overall analysis.

### *ACTOR ANALYSIS*

Actors play a key role within the political and institutional framework of a city. They are embedded within it, however they also shape and influence the framework within decision-making processes. Therefore, interviews with key actors represent the second source of data. This part of the analysis takes place as part of the perspectival approach and also plays a role in the processual view. Hence, in a first step, actor analysis gives an overview of involved actors in the respective initiative or project. This is done in a simple descriptive manner, in order to portray the actor landscape. Secondly,

all actors are located on a grid that specifies their institutional embeddedness and role. The nature of the role is very much connected to the individual or group interest, the power influence but also resources that actors can utilize. Further, the institutional setting is divided into local, regional and international levels, whereas the international level does not play a distinctive role in this research. In the last step, an explanatory approach is used to understand at what specific points in time certain actors came into play with regard to the emergence of experimental governance.

Shrinkage is a complex phenomenon, hence the approaches to the challenges that come with it will not be simple and straightforward either. More so, the complexity of today's society and relationships between different actors urge to understand this system that might offer new solutions to existing problems. A detailed actor analysis and the dynamics of their interactions with the focus on individual meaning-making and how certain actors view and order their worlds (Yanow, 2000) is particularly important in order to portray a proper contextualized picture of the respective situation. Hence, a lot of attention is paid to how understandings of certain events, interactions, relationships, processes, conflicts and so on differ, due to either prior experiences of the respective actor or position in an actor-network constellation, resources or power relations (ibid.). Within this frame, this research

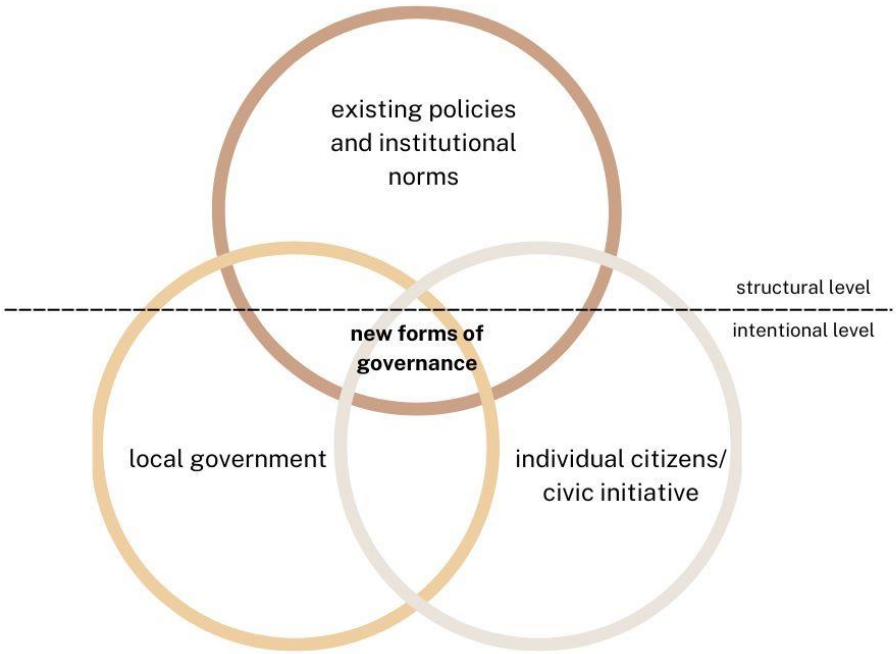


Figure 4. Level of analysis. Author's own, following Kooiman (2003)

focuses on the individual level of residents and members of the local government, who, together with policies and institutional norms and values, contribute to new forms of governance (see Figure 4). In line with Sørensen and Torfing (2009) the understanding of governance in this thesis puts a lot of emphasis on the complexity of its arrangements and relations. Moreover, self-steering capacities of individuals within governance arrangements have received a new meaning in recent years. Additionally, society has become more dynamic and diversified (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009) and is increasingly asking for more effective governance by overcoming bureaucracy and giving way to motivated initiatives, organizations and individuals. Following the work of Kooiman (2016) on interactive governance, the focus on the individual level makes sense as well, as he refers to the self-governance capacity of citizens who increasingly become the managers of previously public tasks. Additionally, in the words Kooiman (2003) the two levels of interaction are scrutinized: the structural level, which represents the existing policies, regulations and institutional norms as well as the intentional level of interaction, comprising involved actors, who are civil society and the local government.

## *CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS AND RESTRICTIONS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC*

Based on the conducted actor analysis, semi-structured expert interviews were conducted. This method for data collection was chosen by the researcher as it is the most in-depth way of generating detailed information of personal opinions and the interviewee's view of the case. Therefore, various key actors have been interviewed according to a pre-defined interview guide with four main blocks: personal background and information, perception of shrinkage, project specificities and governance change and lastly, outlook. These blocks were generated based on literature review and development of research questions and hypotheses. The interview-guide has been then adapted to the for the local context as well as actor which resulted in two different interview guides and several

The first interviews in the Heerlen case were conducted face to face in the office that was provided for my secondment during September and October 2020. They lasted between 45minutes to almost two hours. Due to the critical COVID-19 situation in this time however, I had to leave the Netherlands quickly and continued the rest of the interviews via Microsoft Teams. In general, the quality of the digital interviews was very good and they lasted more than one hour each. Nevertheless, it has to be emphasized that conducting interviews in this setting has had some minor negative effects on the interviewer's side when it comes to interpreting body language of the interviewee. The digital

room does feel artificially created and making the interview partner feel comfortable is thus a more difficult task.

## 7.3 DATA ANALYSIS

The main method of analysis in this thesis in qualitative content analysis, following Mayring (Mayring and Fenzl, 2014) and Kuckartz (2019) and interpretive analysis following Yanow (2000). By applying pre-determined code categories, which I derived from literature analysis, the interviews and documents were studied by using MAXQDA software. These codes rely predominantly to the perspectival approach and the processual view explained in Figure 3 in CHAPTER 6 ANALYTICAL, PERSPECTIVAL, PROCESSUAL CONCEPTUAL METHODS. The perspectival approach is defined by 1)showing the elements of the system, 2)their relationships, 3)means and motivations, 4)resources, 5)individual values and 6)political, institutional, cultural norms and values. Whereas the processual view 1)traces the process of change in governance, 2)identifies facilitators and barriers, 3)analyzes long-term perspectives of experiments with governance. Therefore, the codes applied were used to define the behavior of actors, by asking the following questions (selection):

(i) Who came up with the idea for the initiative/project?
(ii) Who started the initiative/project effectively?
(iii) What was the reason for it, and did it change over time?
(iv) Who were the actors involved and how did they come together?
(v) How did actor constellations change over time, and why?
(vi) What were the obstacles and facilitating factors along the way?
(vii) How did existing boundaries change over time?
(viii) What was learned and how were the experienced translated into long-term changes?

Additionally, I used open coding to define subcodes, if needed, and identify new code categories. These findings allowed the reconstruction of an actor-network in the two cases. In the following analytical step, inductive process tracing (Bennett and Checkel, 2015), I looked for causal inferences that allowed for experiments with governance processes or the governance system in general. These inferences made the abstraction process in the conclusions possible.

## 7.4 CASE STUDY SELECTION

Given the comparative case study approach (Yin, 2014) of this research, cases were selected based on similar features. Those background features are: shrinkage context, governance context, a decisive event as trigger of population decline and experimental governance pathways. Figure *5* shows the selected case study areas, which are two different, geographically defined cases: the city of Heerlen in the Netherlands and Halle(Saale) in Germany.

The two cases were primarily chosen from a shrinking cities optic, and represent similar forms of shrinkage, and stabilization periods. This was done in order to ensure a comparative gesture of the addressed problem. In both cases, the city government was identified as one of the actors within the experimental governance model, and therefore, the results can be scaled to the city level. The lens of overnance on city level in both cases further ensures a comparative approach. Further, this thesis looks into relations between actors and traces dynamics on an individual level, which might not be possible within a regional scale. The two cases however represent two different geographical scales due to their population size: Heerlen with 86.936 inhabitants in 2021 (CBS, 2022) and Halle(Saale) with 238.061 inhabitants in 2021 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022).

The shrinkage context here refers to long-term population decline of the selected cases. Among the many aspects of shrinkage, population loss is one of the main indicators (Haase et al., 2016b; Hollander and Németh, 2011; Turok and Mykhnenko, 2007). The definition of shrinkage adopted for this research focusses on long-term shrinkage, rejecting short-term fluctuations in population loss. This is in line with the general research concern which questions governance changes as changing a governing structure is unlikely to happen in a sudden way, but rather understood as a long process. It was therefore important to find two cases that experienced long-term population decline. In the case of Heerlen, the population first began to decline in the 1970s/1980s. This period was then followed by a stabilization and even growth, before population decline commenced again in the 1990s. In the case of Halle(Saale), population decline was a consequence of the German reunification in 1989 and only recently stabilized due to immigration again. The two cities are shaped by their industrial past. Heerlen was a prospering mining city, before deindustrialization triggered job losses and subsequently forced people to leave the city in search for jobs in other parts of the country. Halle(Saale) was a site of chemical industries during DDR-times.

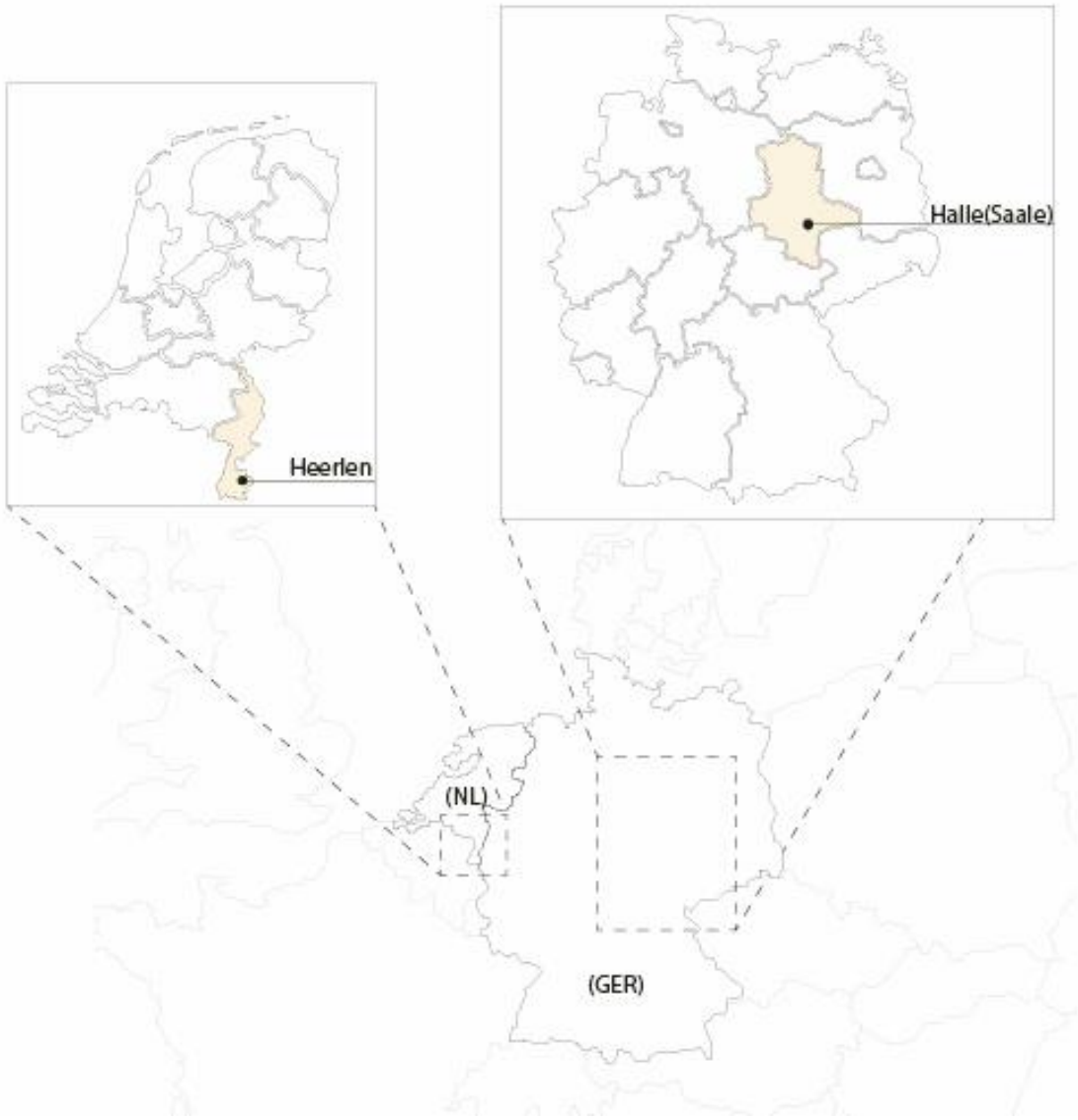


Figure 5. Case study selection. (scaleless) Author's own.

The governance context refers to how the country in which the city is located, is organized politically. Although there is a major difference in both cases, as the Netherlands are organized as a Kingdom, or 'decentralised unitary state' (Forum of Federations, 2022), the political culture has strong decentralist or federalist features in practice and planning. Germany on the other hand is strongly organized in the form of a federal state with 16 states operating at partial sovereignty. Further, governance refers also to the local level in terms of the understanding and opportunities of civic involvement. Shrinkage is a very context-dependent process (Bernt, 2016) and comparison of phenomena within different governing systems and different shrinkage trajectories can be rather difficult. However, a similar understanding of civic involvement, participation is a requirement to answer the question related to the role of active citizenship in experimental governance. Therefore,

this research focusses on cases where forms of civic initiatives have been prominent in the governance of the city. Third, a decisive event as trigger of population decline has been detected as common criterion. Hospers (2014) defines economic transformation, spatial changes, demographic change and political transformation as causes for urban shrinkage. The former refers to deindustrialization and latter can be understood for example as the consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The two selected cases are prime examples of these two causes for urban shrinkage, with Heerlen experiencing population loss and structural shrinkage after the rapid closure of the coal mining industry and Halle(Saale) being faced with outmigration after the reunification of Germany.

Fourth, experimental governance processes or pathways in shrinking cities are scarce. Although, literature highlights the potential of shrinking cities to try out new practices, many examples are not covering the long-term governance perspective, which constitutes the key interest of this research.

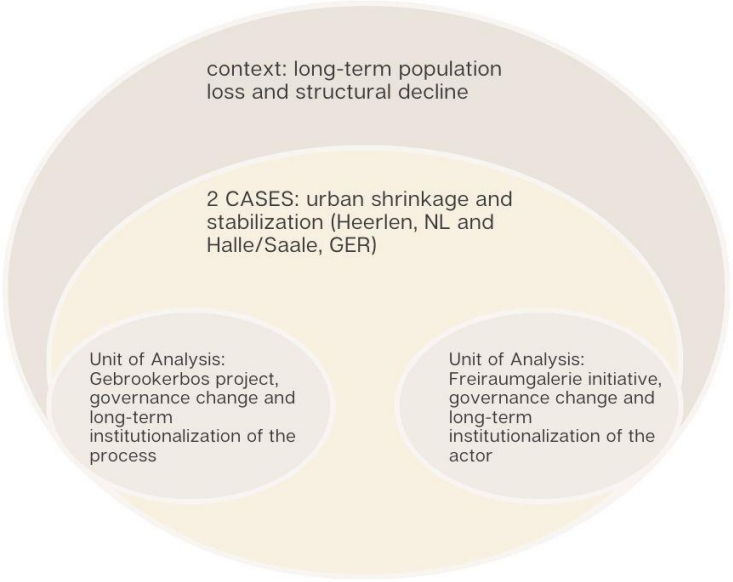


Figure 6. Embedded Multiple Case-Study Design. Author's own.

Additionally, there are two other similarities between the selected cases. On the one hand, the north-western European geographical context is another characteristic that further ensures comparability based on cases having similar background features. Differences between north, north-western and particularly south, east and south-eastern can be quite significant due to the very diverging historical contexts and political cultures. On the other hand, both cases have stabilized their population numbers in recent years. This is an interesting similarity and offers potential to discuss whether the investigated projects and process have been part of this development.

## *MODES OF LEARNING AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH*

The two chosen case studies, Heerlen (NL) and Halle(Saale) (GER) are both situated in the context of long-term urban shrinkage and governance change. This first criterion for case study selection is crucial for the topic of the research, as it focusses on changes in governance structures which are understood not as ad-hoc replacements, but long-lasting structural or small-scale changes within municipal governing systems. The longevity of shrinkage is not defined by a specific amount of years, but by factors that go beyond population loss, such as forms of structural decline. The two cases further represent cases which have stabilized their population after long-term population loss. In this regard, van Assche et al. (2020, p. 12) highlight the potentials of Evolutionary Governance Theory (EGT), which can be applied to scrutinize how "the past of governance systems shapes both its present functioning and its transformation options". This approach underlines how every governance system is unique, how the specific actor constellations and institutional frameworks used to contribute to shaping this system. Every path has an individual dependency and different constraining and encouraging factors. This is important to stress, as the scope of this research is not to find universally applicable measures to change governance system in order to accommodate shrinkage. On the contrary, the goal is to scrutinize differences that are specific to each case study. In line with this, the changes implemented in the local governance of Heerlen, might not work in todays' circumstances anymore. This is called "learning from the past" (ibid.). Although in this thesis, EGT is not explicitly used, it implicitly represents a mode of learning. Here, notions of complexity sciences come into play as well. Complex systems, such as the shrinking city, are always in flux and never static. The relational perspective allows for understanding how each situation is the result of specific relations and situations. With time, these conditions change and therefore the starting point becomes a different one. (see Roo et al., 2016)

Additionally, the comparative approach used in this research, serves as the "learning from other places" mode. This learning mode emphasizes the internal context on the one hand, which comprises the governance system, and on the other hand, the external context, which comprises the actors and the actions, resources, power relations. Here, the connection to complexity sciences can also be traced. Governance systems themselves are open systems; They interact with other systems, and results might vary. Therefore, in comparative learning, is it important to investigate research objects within similar conditions. (see van Assche et al., 2020)

The scope of this research is limited by the focus of the analysis on the individual level. Combined with the implementation of two West-European case studies, the knowledge creation is narrow. Nevertheless, this comparison contributes to the identification of national and international tendencies within governing shrinkage. Additionally, the scope of this research is based on the

knowledge provided mainly by the expert interviews. Here, a probability remains that the saturation of information has not been reached to the fullest, which was a result of the Covid pandemic. However, the necessary saturation was met by interviewing directly involved stakeholders. Further, the limitations of the applied methodology need to be pointed out, which can serve as future points of departures for further research. Within the analysis of the local governance systems, no attention has been paid to underlying regional or national political trends or changes. This research therefore is not discussing any political elections and subsequent changes on the national level within this timeframe. In terms of the devolution of governmental tasks to lower levels, research on the link between state politics and local implementation can be of interest for future research on shrinking cities.

# PART C: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

Understanding shrinking cities has inevitably emerged as an internationally highly relevant topic in research and policy making. The latest acknowledgement as a global phenomenon and the underlying complexities of the process proof that there is still a long way to go. Researchers keep pointing out existing gaps, highlighting the difficulty to portray a holistic and fully theorized concept and definition. This part of the thesis reviews the existing literature on shrinking cities, providing a state of the art and critically draws conclusions with the aim to add to the debate. Therefore, the following chapters address research gaps, definition problems of shrinkage and different ways to approach “solving” the “problem”. Following this, the theory of experimental governance is scrutinized and reflected with regard to shrinkage. Lastly, a discussion of assorted notions of complexity sciences takes place.

# 8 SHRINKING CITIES – FROM PHENOMENON TO CORNERSTONE IN URBAN RESEARCH

Within the past few decades, research on shrinking cities and shrinkage has strongly proliferated within the academic realm. Shrinkage is no new phenomenon, but has been part of urban development processes practically forever, since fluctuations in population loss are a common occurrence. However, there is a new and increased dynamic noticeable which inevitably has driven academic research on the topic to a large and rapid expansion. Several starting points to explain shrinkage can be noticed: political and economic views, demographic explanations or natural disasters, to name the overarching themes. The majority of past studies has largely focused on identifying the causes and effects, whereas recent studies discuss responses to shrinkage (Döringer et al., 2019). What is more, these studies have increasingly questioned traditional and well-established policy-making and planning tools, which have gradually proofed inadequate to accommodate shrinkage. This is largely due to the fact that todays' planning tools and policy-making approaches have been developed under conditions of growth (Radzimski, 2016). Today, research on shrinking cities is increasingly acknowledging the transformative effects that shrinkage can have while highlighting also the role as potential positive catalyst for a more sustainable development of cities. This chapter dives deep into the literature on shrinking cities. First, it discusses the specificities of urban shrinkage, such as definitions, concepts, statistics and associated challenges. With this chapter I focus on the local level of the city and does not discuss regional shrinkage. Second, it dives into the effects of population loss while particularly emphasizing citizens and the individual level.

## 8.1 SHRINKING CITIES: DEFINITIONS AND ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES

Shrinkage has evolved to a "hot topic" (Elzerman and Bontje, 2015) within planning and similar disciplines and gained increasing acceptance as research framework (Haase et al., 2014) in recent years. The early 2000's have hosted a plethora of research projects on shrinkage, such as "Shrinking Cities" project by Oswalt (2005, 2006), the "Shrinking Cities International Research Network" SCIRN, founded in 2004 at the Institute of Urban and Regional Development at the University of California, Berkeley, COST-Action CIRES and the FP 7 project "Shrink Smart". The term shrinking city especially gained attention and spread cross-national through the SCIRN which scrutinized the global extent of shrinkage (Pallagst et al., 2009; Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012). Additionally, there have been several

special issues in renowned academic journals devoted to shrinking cities. However, the international debate has still neither reached consensus on the definition of shrinkage, nor agreed on whether to accept or fight shrinkage. On the contrary, more and more nuances of shrinkage are being discussed as well as different responses highlighted. Bernt et al. (2014) and Haase et al. (2016b; 2017) even question whether a universally applicable definition is needed and highlight the many facets of shrinkage, pointing to a plethora of "shrinkages". The contextual differences from country to country, and even shrinking cities within the same country, contribute to the complexity of grasping the archetype of the phenomenon (Haase et al., 2017). Such differences are diverging terminologies, discourses, cultural, social and political circumstances. Nevertheless, the scholarly community has noted that population loss can be regarded as the indicator of shrinkage.

There are several definitions that have been proposed to explain a shrinking city. Below is a selection of some explanations. Most prominently, the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCIRN) has brought forward a definition quite early on:

*"[…] describes a densely populated urban area with a minimum population of 10,000 residents that has faced population losses in large parts for more than two years and is undergoing economic transformations with some symptoms of a structural crisis.*" (Hollander and Németh, 2011, p. 352)

The group of researchers of the "Shrink Smart – The Governance of Shrinkage within a European Context" project, define shrinkage as follows:

*"[…] an empirical phenomenon resulting from the specific interplay of different macro-processes at the local scale. Such macro-processes may be related to economic, demographic or settlement development, as well as environmental issues or changes in the political or administrative system. Urban shrinkage occurs when the specific interplay of such macro-processes leads to population decline, which we define as being the main indicator for urban shrinkage."* (Rink et al., 2012, p. 164)

Schilling and Logan (2008, p. 452) on the other hand define the population loss by at least 25% over a period of 40 years and as

*"[…] a special subset of older industrial cities with significant and sustained population loss […] and increasing levels of vacant and abandoned properties, including blighted residential, commercial, and industrial buildings";*

Hollander and Németh (2011) in their definition do not provide any benchmarks but explain a shrinking city as a city that is simply losing population. A definition proposed by Turok and Mykhnenko

(2007, p. 169) says that declining cities are cities "*with a rate of population change below their national average*".

There are many more definitions that are either more specific or more loosely phrased. What is interesting about the SCIRN definition is that it clearly explains that population fluctuations that happen in cities and last for less than two years are not defined as shrinkage. Population change to some degree is normal and should not be labelled as shrinkage too soon. Additionally, they highlight economic changes, however do not discuss whether economic decline precedes or supersedes population decline. The definition also refers to structural crisis, meaning that the consequences of population decline manifest themselves in various areas which altogether produce structural changes to the location. SCIRN applies a descriptive approach to shrinkage and is relating to shrinkage as a phenomenon of which the cause has already taken place, by using the words "has faced population loss". This way, population loss is used as the indicator for shrinkage.

The second definition, brought forward by the Shrink Smart-project, on the other hand starts by referring to macro-processes that play out on the local level and produce population decline. It is interesting that the authors but emphasis on the interplay of those macro-processes and say that only if this interplay produces population decline, we can speak of urban shrinkage. This excludes endogenous processes from being responsible for shrinkage. Similar to the SCIRN definition, population decline is defined as indicator for urban shrinkage.

Interestingly, Schilling and Logan (2008) relate shrinkage specifically to deindustrialization and propose a very specific and quite substantial population loss, which is at least 25% and continues over the period of 40 years. In comparison to the SCIRN definition, which defines a minimum of two years of population decline, this is a significantly longer period. The definition is written in present tense and specifically uses the wording "sustained population loss" and additionally they talk about consequences in the built environment due to population loss, such as vacancy, abandonment and blight.

Other scholars stress that shrinkage should not be defined but rather frame it within other phenomena, stating that cities "know it when they see it" (LaCroix, 2010, p. 227), referring to some of the most radical examples in the United States of America, such as Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo or Youngstown. However, it is not as easy because shrinkage remains very interwoven with the local and national conditions and specificities. Even the discourse on shrinkage differs depending on the context. This is why many different terminologies exist and are sometimes (mis)used synonymously and even if the same term is used, scholars might be talking about different phenomena (Haase et al., 2017). Nevertheless, there is a common factor which unites all understandings and definitions of shrinkage,

namely population loss. Although population loss does not reflect the complexity of shrinkage by itself, it is a useful indicator which is easily used and tracked due to its statistical data availability in most cities.

## 8.2 MULTI-SCALAR REASONS FOR SHRINKAGE

Within the past years, several drivers can be noticed which increase the constant drive for expulsion and competition: economic performance, population growth, globalization and so on. Within a world that is shaped by neoliberal politics and increasing austerity measures (Peck, 2012), not all cities can keep up. These external pressures are accelerated by certain macro trends, such as an ageing population, the (second) demographic transition, and previously also deindustrialization. Additionally, political transformations such as the fall of the Iron Curtain, as well as spatial changes at different scales, tend to contribute to the already existing trends and challenges. Together, these


Figure 7. External pressures, macro trends and local manifestations. Author's own.

external pressures and macro trends can locally manifest themselves either in a positive or more negative way (Haase et al., 2016a). Ultimately, some cities emerge as important nodes in the global network (Albecker, 2010) and are reinforced in their economic roles (see Figure 7). Others on the other hand, get “left behind” as “backyards of globalization” (Bernt and Rink, 2010). Here, scholars note that smaller cities are more affected than bigger cities, as they tend to not be part of the global networks (Cunningham-Sabot and Fol, 2009; Elzerman and Bontje, 2015). The distinction between backyards of globalization on the one hand and global cities on the other, is of course simplified. A more nuanced

understanding of why some cities “make it” and others are “left behind” is precisely an important strand of research in scholarly discourse on shrinking cities.

There is not *the* one reason responsible for shrinkage. Although some scholars try to define different potential causes, it is their interplay that makes shrinkage a complex process. Hospers (2014) for example distinguished four causes: economic transformation, spatial changes, demographic change and political transformation. *Economic transformation* in the form of deindustrialization shaped many countries and cities in the 1970s and beyond and resulted in economic recession and unemployment. With increasing globalization and neoliberal economic trends, the former industrialized, and especially the cities which relied heavily on one single industry, were deeply affected (Alves et al., 2016). In many deindustrialized countries and cities, large scale unemployment was the immediate result, as especially blue-collar workers were not able to find jobs. In some countries, national and regional measures were implemented in order to curb the rise of unemployment. For example, in the Netherlands, several national institutes were moved to Heerlen, a shrinking city in the south of the country. A pension fund and a University were supposed to compensate for the lost industry. However, these newly created jobs did not match the qualifications of mining workers (Ročak, 2019). This in turn led to a decrease in the household income and increasing dependence on social benefits. Additionally, due to a lack of job opportunities in the specific sector, the outmigration of a specific age group accelerated social problems in already economically weak cities. This in turn had effects on the social composition of the city and potentially contributed to segregation tendencies (Fol, 2012). Urban shrinkage as a result of deindustrialization is representative of several many shrinking cities at the end of the 20$^{th}$ century.

Further, Hospers (2013) mentions *spatial changes* at different scales as contributing factor to urban shrinkage. The increasing concentration of economic activity in the few large city regions in Europe, is creating a centralization process that excludes regular or “ordinary” cities. At the same time, within cities, retail and business centers are often placed outside the city center, causing the so called “hollowing out” of inner cities. Suburbanization and urban sprawl are also identified as one of the major factors accounting for shrinkage (Couch et al., 2005; Rieniets, 2009). They are spatial changes motivated by various different reasons, amongst which the loss of attractiveness of inner-city neighborhoods in the early 1990s is a crucial factor. This is also on line with the event of the Fall of the Iron Curtain in Europe, where large housing estates and inner-city neighborhoods rapidly became unattractive after periods of systematic neglect by socialist regimes (Bontje, 2004). The redistribution and loss of economic function, paired with population loss can push cities into a “cycle of abandonment and decline” (Bernt, 2009). Spatial changes of economic redistribution are largely a result of the emergence of a globalized economy. Capital has become ever more mobile and is driving rapid

relocations of investment to favorable places (Audirac, 2018). Shrinking cities, or peripheral and industrial areas on the other hand, are “highly vulnerable to the up-and downswings of global capital” (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012). As such, globalization and recent economic transformations are increasingly affecting a wide variety of cities.

*Demographic change* comprises another reason for urban shrinkage. Low fertility and increased ageing, or increasing life expectancy are contributing to a rising average age level in many European countries. This second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe, 1991; Van de Kaa, Dirk J., 1987) is responsible for an overall decreasing population growth, especially in Europe. Turok and Mykhnenko (2007) have pointed out that this trend is likely to continue over the next years as well and Großmann et al. (2013) even stress that the demographic challenge will not only persist, but rather increase in the future.

*Political turnover and transformation* such as the Fall of the Iron Curtain are further responsible for urban shrinkage. On the one hand, the political transformation from socialism to democracy and the change from plan economy to market economy has created many problems but also opportunities in many cities. This transition in turn lead to the out-migration of many people to the West, accelerating the so-called brain drain. Additionally, the changes in post-socialist countries had to take place quickly. The rapid privatization of state-owned companies especially forced many industries to shut down, producing massive job losses of industrial jobs. Here, cities and regions which relied heavily on one industry faced major crises (Bontje, 2004). Additionally, the housing market suffered with the introduction of market rates and produced new inequalities, resulting in new migration patterns. The Fall of the Iron Curtain in particular had a substantial impact on the cities of former East Germany. Research on shrinkage in the European context largely stems from the repercussions of this event.

Wu et al. (2013) summarized the reasons for shrinkage around three major concepts: (i) *shrinkage is imposed,* (ii) *shrinkage due to comparative disadvantages,* and (iii) *shrinkage due to societal or global changes.* The former describes above mentioned events such as political, economic or environmental crises. Shrinkage due to comparative disadvantages explains why certain places “succeed” and others are “left behind” and largely refers to differences in economic opportunities but also climate conditions. The latter summarizes the second demographic transition, the decline in fertility but also ageing as well as climate change as a global factor.

However, these reasons are based on the city as unit of analysis. It is well known that shrinkage can be intertwined with the development of the wider region. Bernt (2016) for example argues that the current research relies too heavily on the description of shrinkage as a more or less universal

phenomenon with specific local manifestations. He argues for a more scaled view that addresses the different ongoing processes on various scales.

The above-mentioned reasons for shrinkage refer to a great extent to the European context. The shrinking cities literature has proliferated quickly in Europe and continues to offer numerous studies on shrinking cities. The topic is widely discussed and has found political acceptance over the years. In the US however, the planning paradigm is even more growth-oriented and is impeding the critical discourse on shrinkage (Popper and Popper, 2002; Hollander et al., 2009).

## 8.3 EFFORTS OF CONCEPTUALIZING AND UNDERSTANDING SHRINKAGE

The previously mentioned reasons for shrinkage are to be understood as factors that can influence the emergence of shrinkage. The interplay of these factors can accelerate the challenges, however, some cities experience shrinkage purely because of demographic change, whereas others are challenged mainly by a different problem (Beauregard, 2009). Additionally, there are differences within regions where some cities can experience growth while others are shrinking. Therefore, macro-trends do not sufficiently explain the regional differentiation of shrinkage (Hoekveld, 2012). Additionally, the complexity of shrinkage and the difficulty in defining the phenomenon rises, because consequences of shrinkage cannot be exactly differentiated from its causes (Hoekveld, 2012; Camarda et al., 2015). Shrinkage has been defined to have an effect on the composition of the population, on infrastructure, housing stock, service provision and so on. However, the quality and attractiveness of these factors can in turn also be a cause for outmigration and trigger demographic decline.

These challenges further complicate a conceptualization of shrinkage. Haase et al. (2014) have developed a heuristic model (see Figure 8) to aid in understanding shrinkage by including causes, consequences as well as responses to shrinkage. With this model of conceptualization, the authors include external forces, such as economic decline, political conflicts or demographic change which can have an impact on the cities on the local scale. They further include feedback loops, which on the one hand point to the above-mentioned bi-directional character of causes and consequences of shrinkage. On the other hand, the authors include the responses on the governance-level, which are triggered by shrinkage, however also can accelerate certain tendencies. Importantly, multi-scalar and multi sectoral governance approaches and responses as well as the agency of different actors are included in the model. Additionally, the temporal factor has been addressed in “phases” in previous attempts of

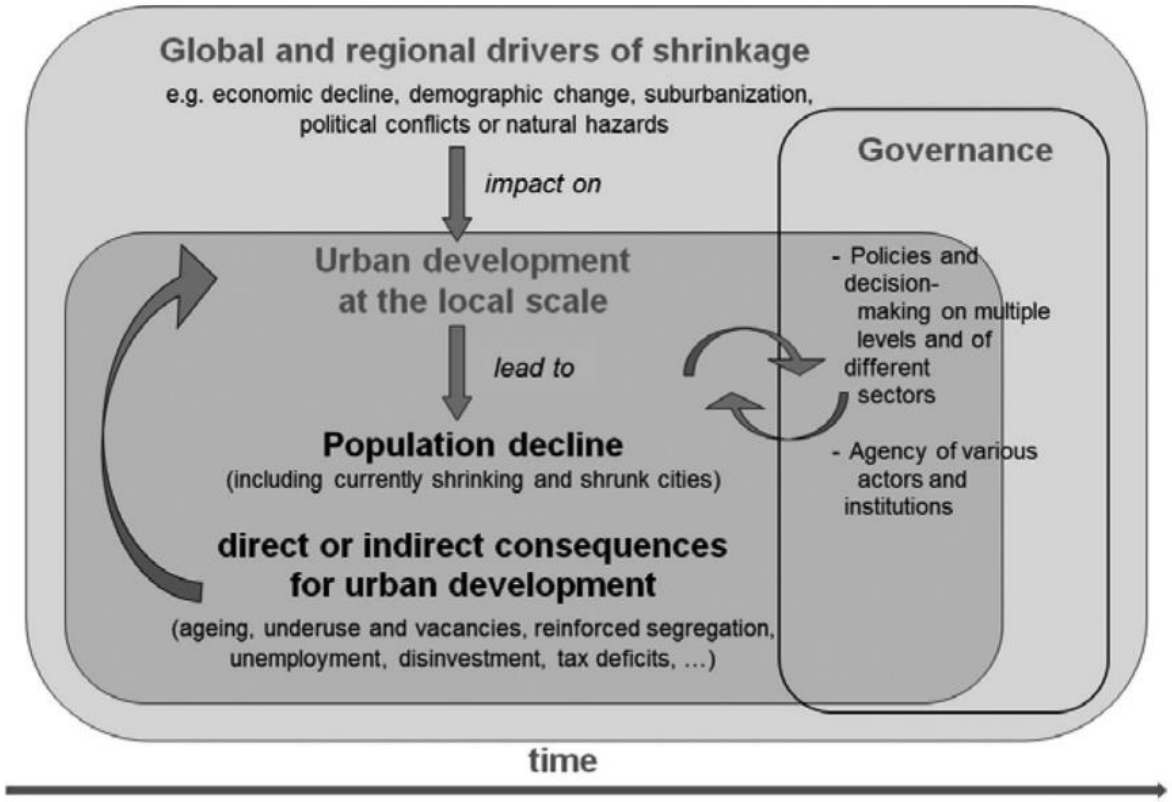


Figure 8. Heuristic model of shrinkage. Source: Haase et al. (2014)

conceptualizing shrinkage that are passed before a city moves to the next phase. In the model presented by Haase et al. (2014) developments and feedback loops occur within a time frame and not within phases, in order to highlight the highly dynamic character of shrinkage.

Previous attempts of conceptualizing shrinkage focused heavily on life-cycle theories of urban development (see van den Berg et al., 1982a). According to these early interpretations, shrinkage was a phase of urban development, which followed urbanization and subsequently suburbanization. Desurbanization was considered the third phase, describing population loss of an urban area. Such outmigration occurs to small and medium sized cities in the hinterland of the urban area, according to the conceptualization by van den Berg et al. Such explanations however, consider shrinkage or population loss as an inevitable future of urban agglomerations and propose reurbanization as a potential for depopulated cities. A nuanced differentiation is severely lacking, and taken over by overly homogeneous portrayal of path dependencies in cities.

Driven by the theories of capital accumulation (Harvey, 1982), other understandings of shrinkage explain population loss as consequence of disinvestment in an area. Capitalist urbanization is driven

by investment, disinvestment and reinvestment in urban areas. Cities lose their attractiveness due to disinvestment in the area, and consequently drive people to move away. Other places manage to attract investment and therefore attract residents. Haase et al. (2014, p. 1522) summarize that "shrinkage (like gentrification) is movement by capital, not people". On a similar note, labor and forms of production have, not at last proved by the postindustrial decentralization of manufacturing, proved to be able to steer urban and regional development. Many of these explanations are relying on the assumption that urban development is only achievable through growth – capital growth, population growth, growth in size. This growth-driven thinking is a byproduct of the industrial revolution of the 19th century and since then heavily influencing urban development.

Summarizing, there are two major trends in understanding shrinkage, of which one places shrinkage within the natural process of urban development (Hager and Schenkel, 2000; van den Berg et al., 1982b), whereby population loss alternates with population growth. The second views shrinkage as an event, or a consequence of an extreme event, which induces a continuous process of decline. Additionally, urban shrinkage is very context dependent and emerges or develops when certain place-specific factors interplay. It matters how the process is influenced by multi scalar governance processes and how European politics trickle down to the local level. Further, shrinkage is subject to forces of public and private interests (Haase et al., 2016b). In a similar line, Aalbers and Bernt (2019) apply a political economy-view on shrinkage and reject the notion that shrinking is a natural process. More so, such a notion conceals agency and power in the analysis of shrinkage. Actions of specific actors, such as governments, corporations, developers and others need to be highlighted and critically discussed with relation to power dynamics and their influence on urban development.

It becomes apparent that shrinkage is a complex matter, resulting of many variables. The concept of resilience has been applied to understand why some cities manage to overcome and recover from a big event, or shock, while others do not succeed (Kotilainen et al., 2015). In this regard, (shrinking) cities show their potentials as complex adaptive systems.

## 8.4 EFFECTS OF SHRINKAGE

The implications of population loss can be manifold. In this chapter, I am specifically focusing on the effects of shrinkage, rather than population loss, as they might differ. Whereas the typical consequences of population loss are rather straight forward: vacancy and lower demand for housing, underutilized infrastructure, losses in the municipal budget due to lower tax revenue; the impact of long term and structural shrinkage is more complex. Hospers (2014) defines the "hardware",

"software" and "mindware" of cities, that can all be affected by shrinkage. The first describes the more obvious and tangible developments of population loss, such as direct consequences of fewer inhabitants in a city. Significant population loss can manifest itself on the housing market, the physical and social infrastructure and the local economy. Most prominently, vacancy is a visible outcome and leads to a loose housing market situation. The effects on the municipal budgets are significant too, in the regard that a smaller budget often leads to staff cuts and therefore certain public services might not be guaranteed anymore. Social infrastructures such as kindergartens and schools often remain underutilized and have to be closed. The closure of kindergartens and schools is a particularly severe issue in regions and simultaneously a very common one, as young people tend to move away from shrinking cities and the elderly are being left behind. This in turn increases the need for other social infrastructure, such as retirement facilities and hospitals. The underusage of technical infrastructure, such as trams, busses and metro lines tend to create even more costs for maintenance. These effects of population loss on the "hardware" of a city in turn increase costs for the remaining population who has to make up for the maintenance and upkeep of the remaining infrastructure.

In addition to these countable implications, the urban "software" can be challenged too. Hospers (2014) summarizes the urban software as the norms and values of the residents, which is affected particularly due to the selective outmigration that often occurs in shrinking cities. The young and educated have been found to leave shrinking cities more than elderly, which changes the socio-demographic composition of a city. Some scholars (Rodríguez-Pose, 1999) have argued that selective outmigration can have an effect on the levels of entrepreneurship, innovative and creative practices. On the other hand, recent research has shown that shrinking areas in fact can produce socially innovative initiatives (Ubels et al., 2022).

Lastly, urban shrinkage can affect the urban "mindware", the image of a city negatively. The thought behind this conclusion is that the external image of a shrinking city can contribute to the internal image in a negative way as well. How the outside world portrays a certain shrinking city matters to the local population and how they view their home. The term "shrinkage" itself bears already a heavy weight which is why several other terms have been suggested to describe the state of a city, such as "waiting cities" or "lean cities" (Sulzer, 2007). A more positive connotation to shrinkage could contribute to more empowerment and self-worth of the residents in shrinking cities.

However, more distinctive outcomes of fairly recent research have also shown that some of the effects of population loss, such as vacancy, can turn out as an advantage as well. Some scholars conclude that in fact, shrinking cities can also be happy and prosperous places and should not be viewed through a 'one size fits all' lens that equals shrinkage to decline (Hirt and Beauregard, 2019;

Hartt, 2019). In some cases, shrinking cities have shown a higher life satisfaction than growing cities (Hartt, 2019). In another study on US shrinking cities, Hartt (2018a) makes a connection between demographic and economic indicators and shows, that cities can even lose population and perform economically at the same time.

The impact of population loss and structural shrinkage on housing can be severe. The crisis of the east German housing market and the resulting vacancies post reunification have shaped the shrinking cities literature and taken as a starting point of research in many cases. The transformation of the political system in east Germany and the associated wide spread shrinkage have formed a significant political as well as academic interest in the subject in Europe (Haase et al., 2017). Decreasing population numbers are thought to inevitably lead to less demand and therefore an oversupply of housing units. This can result in vacancy. However, as Haase, Bernt et al. (2016b) emphasize, shrinkage does not have to lead to vacant housing. More so, the relation between demand and supply needs to be adjusted. A more nuanced view is provided, as the authors explain that the relationship between shrinkage and vacant housing is complex in the sense that the housing demand is "not entirely elastic" (Haase et al., 2016b, p. 96). Due to selective outmigration, demographic change and increased ageing, smaller households are of higher demand. However, in the cities researched by the authors, in western and eastern Europe, a tendency to use more space by fewer residents can be observed. Moreover, housing policies of the past have been associated with how the housing market responds to population loss and shrinkage. Whereas housing has not been a central priority in many eastern European countries under socialist planning, and the housing market was rather tight to begin with, shrinkage might provide a loosening of the demand and lead to a more relaxed market (ibid.).

Summarizing, the effects of population loss and shrinkage are manifold. They can and in most of the cases, are interrelated. They can reinforce each other and can contribute to structural shrinkage. Most importantly, the implications of structural forms of shrinkage, such as economic downturn, employment decline, followed by social problems, create even more challenges for those who remain in cities affected by severe structural shrinkage. Several scholars have stressed that the residents who stay, are in most cases of a low socio-economic status, meaning marginalized and vulnerable groups, unemployed residents, those with comparatively little education as well as the elderly (Fol, 2012; Ubarevičienė and van Ham, 2016).

## 8.5 APPROACHES TO DEAL WITH SHRINKAGE – "SOLUTIONS"

Ever since the growth paradigm overshadowed other trajectories of cities and declared those as not desirable, concepts to actively deal with shrinkage and reverse the phenomenon started to become popular. Several consequences of shrinkage and population loss that turn into serious problems, also trigger policy makers to develop responses to steer the future development. Hospers (2014, 2013) provides four straight forward types of policy responses towards shrinkage that mainly account for European cases: (1) trivializing shrinkage, (2) countering shrinkage, (3) accepting shrinkage and (4) utilizing shrinkage (see also Verwest, 2011). The authors summarize under "trivializing shrinkage" any forms of maintaining the current status of a city or waiting. Usually policies are not adapted with regard to potential future shrinkage and generally the observable developments, such as population decline and selective outmigration are not taken seriously. "Countering shrinkage" describes efforts of policy makers to act actively against the processes and return to urban growth. This is done by upgrading the built infrastructure and increased property development. Some examples include efforts of attracting young creatives, tech firms or students, by getting rid of tuition fees or lowering taxes. Place branding and increased marketing strategies also fall in this category and represent one of the most common strategy to counteract shrinkage (Niedomysl, 2007). However, as Blažek and Uhlíř (2007) pointed out, such approaches tend to be very similar in different shrinking cities. Some places fail to find and underline what actually makes them unique and promote themselves with the typical jargon of being creative and innovative. Additionally, the competition for similar population groups, such as the young and creatives, oftentimes fails as the mobility of people is overrated (see Rink et al., 2012). In a similar line, other studies on place marketing make clear the unsuitability of such marketing strategies that are not catered to the localities, as they were not found to have any outstanding effect on the in-migration of younger groups or companies (see for example Pellenberg and Meester, 2009). However, some examples of shrinking cities that relied heavily on rebranding and marketing show that the incorporation of such approaches within a comprehensive strategy that addresses other issues as well, can be indeed successful. Most prominently, the "Bilbao effect" stands out for urban regeneration through flagship developments. However, iconic architecture and particularly the creation of the Guggenheim museum did contribute to the image change of the shrinking city and boosted economic activity that ultimately attracted investors and residents. Such a property development-focused approached is contested and critically discussed in the scholarly community. Particularly the question of public investment that went in the strategy is central, as the implementation of such strategies is not guaranteed to have spillover effects to improving general urban conditions and thus makes them a very risky alternative (Ortiz-Moya, 2015;

Loftman and Nevin, 1995). In the case of Bilbao, Spain the investment in symbolic infrastructure acted as a catalyst to further improvements (Evans, 2003).

Policies towards "accepting shrinkage" on the other hand adapt to the changing circumstances in order to reduce the negative implications of shrinkage. Shrinkage here, is regarded as a new context for planning and policy making with the aim to stabilize the current population and maintain quality of life (Wiechmann and Pallagst, 2012). Policies in this regard often address housing issues and the implementation of right-sizing measures. Such measures have been most prominently implemented in East Germany as well as in the Rustbelt cities of the United States. Right-sizing typically includes the reduction of the built environment to the current, lower population size, meaning tearing down residential buildings. Some scholars use different terminologies for such policies, such as "smart decline" (Hollander and Németh, 2011), or "downsizing" (Rybczynski, 1995). Right-sizing strategies are a rather contested matter as forecasting that the population will decrease or stabilize is very difficult. The example of Leipzig, Germany, one of the most known (previously) shrinking cities shows how the implementation of large scale right-sizing measures of prefabricated housing units (under the federal program "Stadtumbau Ost"[1]), can lead to an affordable housing shortage once the city started to grow (Cortese et al., 2014). Nevertheless, although the policy responses were heavily focused on the housing market in Leipzig, they were combined within a comprehensive approach to deal with socio-spatial issued. Here, the federal program "Soziale Stadt" was implemented to support disadvantaged neighborhoods and improve public spaces, quality of housing and infrastructure. Other instruments and funding schemes, like the EFRE Fund and the ESF were also mobilized to support Leipzig. Many cities in Eastern Germany took advantage of the funding that was made available in the urban restructuring program. Clearly, housing and the demolition of vacant housing units were of high interest. Scholars note that already in 1998 housing associations expressed interest in proceeding with the introduction of subsidies for right sizing and demolition (Seelig, 2007). The policies in the urban restructuring program were heavily focusing on the housing market, not least because the program was developed on the proposition of an expert commission that had great interest in the housing sector (ibid.). Albeit the urban restructuring program is generally regarded as a success, it is critically discussed amongst scholars. The heavy focus on the housing market and especially demolition, is a

[1] The urban restructuring program „Stadtumbau Ost" was the first federal policy to directly address shrinkage, or the effects of the phenomenon, namely housing vacancy and decay. Many cities in Eastern Germany faced large percentages of vacancy in their housing stock just shortly after the reunification. Especially inner city districts and prefabricated housing units were affected (Radzimski, 2018). The policy was implemented in 2001 and extended after one period until 2016 (Seelig, 2007).

The funds that were made available in this program were used to upgrade urban infrastructure, to implement re-use projects for vacant lots and to improve the quality of public spaces. After facing moderate success, the program was updated and a new form of subsidies was made available wereby municipalities could obtain houses for the purpose of renovation or preservation until sufficient funds were available for proper renovation. Moreover, this funding scheme did not require any financial contribution from the municipalities themselves (ibid.).

contested issue. Radzimski (2016) highlights, that there was a clear imbalance between how much federal subsidies were made available for demolition versus upgrading projects. The federal states together with the states accounted for each half of the costs for demolition so that municipalities did not have to contribute themselves, whereas for upgrading projects, municipalities were supposed to come up with one third of the sum. Therefore, demolitions were much more attractive financially for municipalities (ibid.).

"Utilizing shrinkage" describes taking advantage of shrinkage and working towards notions of "slow cities" ("cittaslow") (see Hospers, 2014) but also degrowth (Camarda et al., 2015). Such policies can include the stimulation of local entrepreneurship, but also special strategies and concepts for the elderly.

Within the scholarly community it is widely agreed upon today, that shrinkage can also pose an opportunity for cities. A reduced density of population, a structured de-densification of built infrastructure and an orientation to the uniqueness of a place can offer potentials for the future development, away from growth. This can be largely dedicated to an approaching new paradigm that does not rely on growth only, but also to the fact that shrinkage has been acknowledged as a ubiquitous and very common phenomenon. Therefore, planning policies and strategies have proliferated. Oswalt (2005) phrased this as having the possibility for "weak planning", and Radzimski (2018) calls them "soft measures". Strategies in the area of culture, communication, and empowerment of the local community are seen as alternatives to the harsher interventions of right sizing or place commodification strategies in the form of extensive marketing (Hospers, 2011). However, getting shrinkage on the policy agenda itself is a major challenge (Nelle et al., 2017). In many countries, cities are being left alone with these issues and have to work out locally how to approach shrinkage. Germany sets an example where actors beyond the local level have raised sufficient awareness to the issue in order for it to be addressed on the national scale. Nelle et al. (2017) also argue that areas of symbolic value to a country tend to receive more attention than others. In the case of Germany, all these factors were achieved due to the invasive transformation after the reunification.

The different trajectories of shrinking cities show that the responses depend heavily on the multi-scalar institutional frameworks they are embedded in (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2016). Effects of certain policies as well as their development differ substantially, not only between countries, but cities and regions (Aalbers and Bernt, 2019). The different welfare state regimes, housing market regulations and tax systems influence how and to what extent governments react to shrinkage (Bontje and Musterd, 2012) and to what degree market forces are facilitated or regulated. However, today this is only true to some extent as welfare regimes have transformed drastically in favor of market forces and

can be accounted for a contributing to the uneven spatial development (Brenner et al., 2010; Peck, 2012).

## *POTENTIALS OF SHRINKAGE?- OPEN SPACES AND GREEN LANDSCAPES*

Shrinkage not only affects the housing market and economic and social patterns of cities. A comparably smaller strand of research is discussing the potentials of the spatial effects of shrinkage for ecology. Demolitions of oversupply of infrastructure (kindergartens, schools and so on) or closure of industries leaves hollow areas or brownfields in the urban fabric and therefore changes land use. The so called “perforated city” (Lütke Daldrup, 2003) offers pockets of unused land that offer potential for different types of uses. Haase (2008) argues that such a perforation of a city can pose positive implications for different species to return to cities, but also on quality of life. Again, Leipzig, Germany, where the term “perforated city” was coined, serves as an example where inner-city green spaces where maintained as such for several years, until the growth trend started to increase the value of such inner-city open spaces. Additionally, a recent study on green infrastructures in shrinking cities shows that although green spaces provide more ecological functions over time, they are expected to drive economic and demographic development, too (Lewis et al., 2022). Other examples of green infrastructures in shrinking cities, such as the expansion of community-driven urban agriculture in Detroit, Michigan, make visible the divergent interests of residents in shrinking cities. Although the emergence of an agricultural food system, that also served a purpose for vulnerable groups in the city, they did not meet the visions of all residents of Detroit, leading to tensions within the community (Colosanti et al., 2012).

Residential vacancy offers another potential for land use change in shrinking cities. Interim and temporary uses were introduced in Germany as a way to access vacant and unused units that could not be demolished, either due to complex ownership questions or particularly their location in city centers. Within the IBA 2010, alternative approaches to deal with vacancy in an informal way were discussed and proposed as a step towards a paradigm shift in urban planning. Vacant spaces were started to be understood as opportunity (Ziehl et al., 2012) and, following the recommendation of Häußermann & Siebel (1985), made accessible to local residents, especially in the form of “do-it-yourself” urbanism  Leipzig again, together with Berlin, was a forerunner in this regard. In order to minimize the illegal use of empty spaces, Leipzig developed a model of the so called “Wächterhäuser” (“guarded houses”) that was managed by a private association HausHalten e.V. and heavily supported and facilitated by the city administration “to create new perspectives for vacant dwellings of which a

large amount was under monumental care" (Matoga, 2019, p. 164). Since then, the model was very efficient in opening up vacant units to informal and creative users and therefore, technically contributed to the decrease of vacancy.

However, the interim use of vacant plots or dwellings is regarded as a "win-win" solution to vacancy, because spaces are opened up to different usage, the temporary users generally rent such spaces for a rent that is substantially below the market rate, and owners do not have to worry about further dilapidation of their units, as they are being taken care of by the temporary users. Moreover, the city gains from such approaches because creatives are contributing to a more lively neighborhood, which drives the image of a city (BMVBS & BBR, 2008). Scholars argue though that such informal tools have undergone increased instrumentalization, professionalization as well as institutionalization through their usage in official place marketing strategies and the promotion of "creative cities" (Dubeaux and Cunningham-Sabot, 2018; Matoga, 2019; Colomb, 2012).

## *ATTENTION TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND CIVIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF URBAN SHRINKAGE*

Shrinkage concerns different actors of the affected realm and increasingly, they become stakeholders with various interests. Reacting to shrinkage is not a top-down planning and policy measure anymore, but a process where many actors come together within new forms of network governance (Audirac, 2018). As shrinkage is strongly affecting resources of the local governments, they rely on relationships with different groups of actors on different levels. Actually, some scholars stress that a shift of power relations between government and civil society should take place in favor of citizens (Hospers, 2014), because the achievements of civil society are not replaceable by governments or market actors. This largely refers to cost-efficient and small scale, but visible and much needed for securing place attachment of the remaining population. Therefore, empowerment of residents together with the rethinking of the role of official actors, is needed. However, as Rink et al. (2010) and Neu (2011) point out, it is challenging to convince citizens to get active while others are moving out and the city is structurally declining. Moreover, the idea of involving citizens and communities due to budget constraints of the government, has been a strategic move of local governments worldwide for many years. Under the term 'participation', citizens have been invited to give comments on public plans and decisions or share their ideas and concerns. However, it can be regarded as largely outdated and not particularly efficient, today. Already in 1969, Arnstein (1969, p. 217) coined the participation ladder, stressing the shift towards citizen control and thus marking a novel era of 'governmental participation' versus the traditional 'civic participation'. Meijer (2018, p. 15) notes that "instead of

being consumers of spatial planning, citizens have become critical producers as well", which is a development that unfolds from the bottom-up and top-down. There is a general trend within society to be more active and engaged within their neighborhoods, but also, the top-down demand from municipal or national governments for more action of citizens and other non-governmental actors, pushes forward this so called "active citizenship". Population decline has been recognized as a driving force to adapt governance processes (Meijer, 2018) and the focus increasingly moved towards "action from the inside" (Camarda et al., 2015, p. 144).

Shrinkage is even less predictable than growth (Haase et al., 2012b), which drives uncertainty in processes and planning decisions. Collaborative forms of governing are therefore much encouraged in shrinking cities, to jointly rethink planning and policy-making, the role of civic society as well as the planner. Recent works of Meijer (2018) and Ubels (2020) demonstrate the changes in local governance systems and how experimental approaches and increased interaction between governmental actors and civic society trigger dynamics in shrinking cities. On the other hand, the question of ownership of public problems (Hospers, 2014) is contested and should be at the top of the list when governmental bodies request civic involvement. In this line, another quest needs attention, namely to what extent civil society is free to choose how, when and where to act. This is particularly important in shrinking cities, when the individual citizen cannot be hold accountable for such a large and complex issue as urban shrinkage. Citizens in such environments, more than anywhere, need adequate and flexible possibilities to get active in their neighborhoods and communities.

## 8.6 GEOGRAPHIES OF SHRINKAGE: A CENTRAL-WESTERN EUROPEAN VIEW

Ever since shrinkage became a highly researched topic, it has been realized that the phenomenon is not an exception, but more so, it is a process that is taking place on the global scale (Richardson and Nam, 2014). Pushing forward the scholarship and discourse around shrinking cities, the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCIRN) underlined the dimension of the phenomenon already several years ago (Pallagst et al., 2009). The studies on various shrinking cities in different continents are manifold. A concise typology is not provided, however there are certain trends that point out the trajectories in different parts of the world. Silverman (2020) differentiates between Western European countries and Japan, who have been experiencing shrinkage or population decline due to declining fertility rates, an ageing population as well as shrinking household sizes. Eastern European countries experience shrinkage mainly as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which was accompanied

by intense structural challenges. Cities in the United States, can to a great extent be found in the Rust Belt area, as a result of de-industrialization and economic restructuring. The same accounts for many cities in Europe, most prominently in the Ruhr Area, but also recently in the Global South. (see also Döringer et al., 2019)

In their meta-analysis of shrinking cities literature, Döringer et al. (2019) observe the unproportionate amount of academic literature on urban shrinkage in Europe. Literature here started to appear since the 1970s, whereas the term is rather new in Japanese scholarly debates. There, it appeared in the year 2000 for the first time. Similarly, in Latin America, the concept of urban shrinkage is just starting to proliferate in academic discussions (Di Pietro, 2021).

Aside from under-theorization of the topic of shrinkage, the complexity of publicly addressing the challenges and acknowledging this development makes it difficult to navigate and plan accordingly. The terminology of decline, shrinkage or a decreasing population is still not always well received or rather, not desirable (Bernt et al., 2014; Wiechmann and Bontje, 2015; Haase, 2008). This is a particular phenomenon in North America, and especially the United States of America, where terminology such as “fastest-dying cities” (Hollander et al., 2009) caused a public aversion towards this terminology in the past. Shrinkage has been considered a taboo topic in the United States for a long time (Wiechmann and Pallagst, 2012; Molotch, 1976; Hollander et al., 2009), while the discourse was advanced directly in other countries, with Germany being at the forefront. Germany since can be regarded as a very influential actor in shaping the research on urban shrinkage, referred to “epicentre” of the international shrinkage debate (Hollander et al., 2009). Further, the United States and the United Kingdom are prominent in the international academic literature (Haase et al., 2017).

In this thesis, two Western-European countries are scrutinized and therefore a closer look at the shrinkage patterns against other continents or countries within Europe is useful. In Western-Europe, the shrinking cities discourse is shaped by the context of postindustrial cities, similar to the United States (Haase et al., 2017). Deindustrialization is regard as one of the main drivers of shrinkage in Germany, paired with the reunification of Germany in 1990 and subsequently the outmigration of population from the former GDR to Western Germany (Nelle et al., 2017). This event by-produced an immense amount of housing vacancies in the former GDR (Mallach et al., 2017), which was subject to the very well researched national program *Stadtumbau Ost.* Cities like Leipzig and Dresden have been researched to a great extent and portray two examples of policy implementation for urban regeneration and revitalization after deindustrialization. Shrinking Western Germany cities on the other hand have profited from the innovative installation of the International Building Exhibition (IBA) Emscher Park in 1999. The IBA Emscher Park collected and presented ideas for rethinking the future

of cities in the Emscher area, as part of the Ruhr area, after their economic decline due to the closure of coal production sites (Shaw, 2002). Shrinkage in Germany therefore, has been affecting many cities and regions of different sizes. Although a concentration of shrinking cities is visible in the Eastern part of the country, the phenomenon is present in Western cities, too, forcing the topic onto national discourse level.

In the Netherlands on the other hand, the border regions are more prone to shrinkage, such as Zeeland or Parkstad Limburg. Heerlen, a city within the Parkstad Limburg region, represents the only urban area in the Netherlands experiencing shrinkage. The region started to decline after the abrupt closure of the mines, which produced massive unemployment and other social issues that eventually triggered national policies to address them (Elzerman and Bontje, 2015). Shrinkage now has been accepted as a process in the region and different approaches, from planning to the emergence of active citizenship, are accommodating the challenges.

What makes the Western-European focus interesting, is that according to Wolff and Wiechmann (2018), “continuously shrinking cities” can predominantly be found in Western Europe, making them an interesting case study for long term processes. However, as the research on post-socialist shrinking cities is starting to proliferate, it becomes obvious that a lot of Europe’s shrinking cities are located there. Nevertheless, a central-western European perspective on shrinkage combines a unique combination of economic and demographic factors that have led to shrinkage, with deindustrialization being a common factor. It is interesting therefore, how a similar cause (reinforced by the post-socialist transformation of the former GDR) is dealt with in different planning systems and cultures. Interestingly, many countries in Western-Europe also apply cultural and tourism-led regeneration policies while in Central-Eastern-European countries, approaches by civil society have an important stance. (Döringer et al., 2019),

# 9 ADOPTING THE LENS OF EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE

Cities have been argued *the* places where change happens. They are loci of societal challenges but also socially innovative places at the same time (Eneqvist and Karvonen, 2021). Historically, cities have always been testbeds for experiments with the core aim to improve the city (Evans, 2011; Hajer, 2016). To a certain extent, this is also true for shrinking cities. They provide not only a surplus of physical grounds to address various issues, but also reflect changes of societal relations, due to a altered composition of inhabitants, resulting from outmigration, and embody the strive for adapting current modes of governing to accommodate the effects of shrinkage, as most shrinking cities strive for reaching a different status quo. Many of the challenges of shrinkage have to be addressed at the local level, since the topic is highly locally sensitive and requires tailored action from within (Camarda et al., 2015). As highlighted by Haase et al. (2016b), shrinkage is not a fate that cities experience, but it can be shaped by actors and decision-making. The turn away from top-down planning towards differentiated and actor-encompassing approaches in the frame of Governance, not Government, has been prominent since the 1990s, and has not skipped shrinking cities. Scholars like Healey (2004; 2003; 2003; 1999), Hajer and Wagenaar (2003) or Innes and Booher (2003, 2004) have been profoundly shaping new planning rationalities at the turn of the century that justify and stress the importance of collaborative and deliberative notions of planning. In an adjacent line, Fischer and Forrester (1993) set a mark in the field by introducing the argumentative turn and scrutinizing a post-positivist view that sees planning processes as products of argumentation and deliberation, strengthening and underlining the communicative character of policy and planning. A more adaptive and emergent understanding of the city has simultaneously superseded controlled and rigidly planned notions of urban development (Kullman, 2013).

In this thesis, the definition of governance is inspired by Mayntz (1993) and Rhodes (1996) and is understood as: “deliberate actions by different formal and informal actors with the aim of changing processes, orders and methods of governing”. This definition includes several important notions. Firstly, *deliberate action* underlines an active strive towards changing or adapting ongoing mechanisms. It presumes a vision for the future that differs from status quo. Secondly, *different actors* highlight the need for co-creation or co-production of change and make clear, that governance is not a top-down mechanism. Lastly, *processes, orders, methods of governing* reflect that governance is understood in many ways, namely in a procedural character, in the form of (rigid) orders or hierarchies and methods or styles.

Building on this, the noticeable trend towards “experimental governance” is picked up which has become a very attractive buzzword in public domains in the last couple of years, driving the development of new forms of governance (Mukhtar-Landgren et al., 2019). Experimenting in urban planning, urban research and urban development in general, has been picked up quickly as form of social innovation that helps in understanding and simultaneously transforming the city (Evans, 2016). Experiments in the urban realm have since been established as effective ways of knowledge production. Most prominently, methods like urban living labs have been developed on the grounds of doing research through experiments. In fact, experimentation in the urban realm has become so popular on various scales and for different actors, that it can be regarded as an emerging strategy of governance. Experimentation on the city-level has become a driver for change on a higher level, often referred to as system change (Geels, 2011; Evans 2016). Bulkeley and Castán Broto (2013) even refer to “government by experiment”, and further elaborating on strategic interest of public authorities, but also the co-existence of grassroot experiments to provide alternative pathways for the addressed issue. Thus, a form of *governance by experiment* can be observed, that puts forward a novel learning culture between actors involved in experiments, between experiments, but also between experiments and the urban realm and institutional context (Potjer, 2019). It ultimately is built on strong collaborative relations and a mutual understanding of the variety of actors in cities, their perceptions and motivations as well as true civic involvement in urban development that goes far beyond participation.

This chapter scrutinizes the theory of experimental governance and breaks down to what extent this novel policy instrument provides a rational for shrinking cities. In particular, it draws attention to the organizational and institutional capacity of municipalities (of shrinking cities) for implementing experimental governance notions that go beyond singular experiments in the form of short-term projects.

## 9.1 COLLABORATIVE AND CO-PRODUCING APPROACHES AS TRIGGERS OF TRANSFORMATION

Increasingly, urban development and spatial planning rely on citizen involvement and collaborative, horizontal approaches of governance and the action of many actors to solve complex challenges (Bianchi, C., Nasi, G., Rivenbark, W.C., 2021; Eneqvist et al., 2022). Modernist, technocratic decision-making by public authorities, that dominated the field for a long time, are found to be flexible enough to do so. Collaborations between the public sector and citizens has entered the sphere with

renewed vigor in recent years, and is beginning to transform the role of citizens in urban development. Not only have urban matters moved from being a government-responsibility and activity to governance, but also shifted towards participative approaches (Innes and Booher, 2004), co-creation and co-production (Bisschops and Beunen, 2019; Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012). Two processes became apparent: on the one hand, public authorities make increased efforts to design inclusive participatory processes and on the other hand, citizens themselves want to become involved and active in shaping their neighborhoods (Boelens and Roo, 2014; Meijer and van der Krabben, 2018). This rise in civic action can be traced to a renewed interest in the local community, an increased place attachment and identity but also very contested matters such as the declining welfare state, austerity politics or the privatization of public services (Healey, 2015; Igalla et al., 2019). Different forms of such collaborative or co-productive approaches have been part of shaping large-scale urban transformations and usually include the "typical" actors such as the public sector, citizens, the private sector, and academia. Within the public sector, municipalities have become crucial players in facilitating citizen involvement and driving innovations and experiments (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013; Warbroek and Hoppe, 2017). Still considered a learning process, experiments with governance are becoming ever more attractive due to their potential to significantly contribute to sustainable solutions and community resilience (Bovaird, 2007). Such collaborative approaches often comprise a multitude of informal and formal relations and processes and have been assorted many different terms, such as "collaborative governance" (Ansell and Gash, 2007), "network governance" (Rhodes, 1996), "participatory governance" (Fung and Wright, 2001), "interactive governance" (Torfing, J., B. Peters, J. Pierre, Sørensen, E., 2012), "experimental governance" (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013), "co-governance", but also "co-production", "co-creation" (Voorberg et al., 2015).

All of the above-mentioned salient frameworks support the thought of a greater involvement of citizens in policy or planning processes. They all stem from the realizations that 1) the classic model of participation can be susceptible to misuse by various actors, and not be productive or efficient, much rather exploited by certain stakeholders (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) and 2) even though the participatory turn in planning has been propagated as a new paradigm, citizen participation remains rather superficial, project-related and has still not found its way into critical governmental processes and decision-making stages (Ackerman, 2004). The concept of co-production has found its niche within the plethora of frameworks as a particular form that stands out, due to its claim of knowledge creation and research efforts that are co-produced. It therefore goes beyond the classic definition as service-delivery strategy (Albrechts, 2013). It rather means a way of engaging different stakeholders, particularly grassroots organizations, civic organization as well as formal state actors, as instrument of urban governance (Galuszka, 2019) that moves away from project-related work, but strives "towards

more substantive change" as well as "more substantive engagement" by citizens (Mitlin, 2008, p. 353). In this regard, collaborative efforts of different stakeholders can lead to a reconfiguration of urban governance (Horlings et al., 2021).

Collaborative and participatory approaches to governing urban development have already been scrutinized by Healey (1997; 1998; 2003) as well as Innes and Booher (2010) to a great extent, and expanded by the concept of co-production and co-creation mainly by Bovaird (2007) and Bovaird and Loeffler (2012). The scholars state at various instances that civic participation in governmental processes is simply not efficient enough. Cornwall (2004) draws attention to the distinction of invited spaces of participation versus invented spaces, highlighting that most of so-called participatory or co-produced projects and initiatives are legitimized by governments. True invented spaces of participation are claimed by grassroots and confront authorities directly, in hope of a greater societal and governance change. Participation is a highly political topic that is not merely hindered by institutional design problems (Fung, 2015). With the recent trends towards innovation and experimentation in the public sector, the relations between the various urban actors are changing and evolving towards new partnerships, triggering a common agenda and consensus about the necessary actions and co-creating them. However, as Klijn & Koppenjan (2000) highlight, this process is not simple and requires planning and structure to achieve a successful collaboration. It is therefore crucial to understand, how such governance arrangements and processes emerge, develop over time and sustain for longer periods of time. *

## 9.2 TURNING TO ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

The idea of participation is regarded as a fundamental part of democracy (Arnstein, 1969). Theoretically, it should be endorsed as it provides a platform for citizens to voice needs and opinions, shifts power imbalances, fosters democratic accountability and achieves goals in urban policy that are supported by citizens (ibid.). Nevertheless, the term *participation* tends to represent an outdated concept that relies heavily on the information of citizens and receiving their confirmation for top-down decisions. Participation in its original form therefore, has been found to not provide the expected results and the satisfaction of a truly collaborative, inclusive process. Particularly, citizens' desire to be involved from start to finish and meeting complex societal issues through governmental processes remain unsatisfied. In this regard, Arnstein's ladder of participation (1969) (Figure 9) provides a useful orientation of the degrees of real citizen power and influence in the various forms of participation. Today, the role of citizens is increasingly moving away from being only informed about plans and actions, to being partners in collaborative set-ups and to those having the actual control over decisions, in many (Western-European) countries. This has several significant implications on the decision-making process and design. By moving away from 'participatory planning' by which citizens are invited

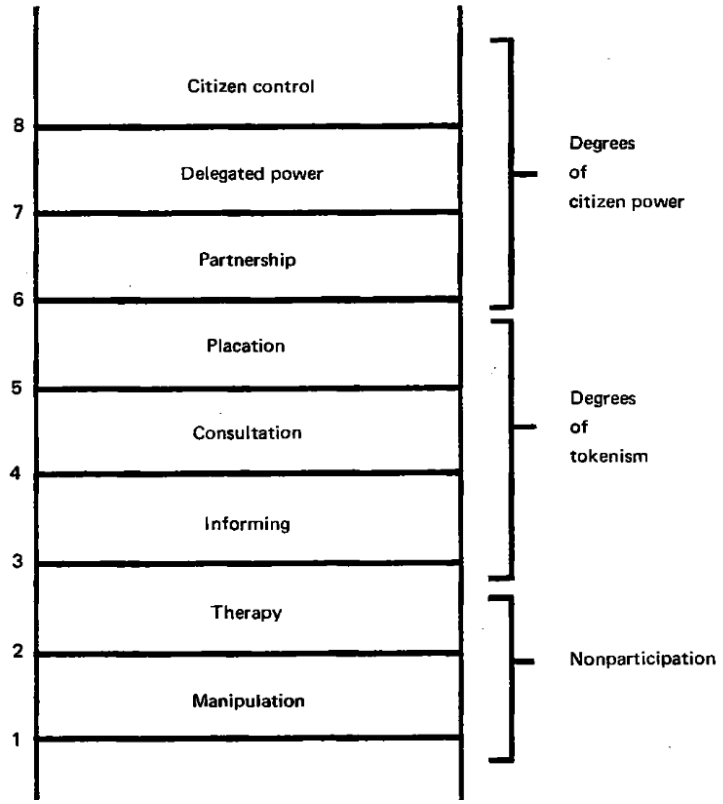


Figure 9. Ladder of participation. Arnstein (1969)

to participate in already established formal processes and systems[2], the divide between citizens and decision-makers can increasingly be blurred. This is in line with the rationale of co-production, namely to delete the stark divide between producers and consumers of goods, services and policies (Boyle, D. & Harris, M., 2009). Additionally, moving away from participation creates an opportunity for citizens to be involved in setting the agenda and not contributing to already defined topics of discussion. In turn, agendas can look quite different and more place-specific due to the in-depth knowledge of neighborhoods and emerging challenges (see also White, 1996). While this trend is a very romanticized way to look at participation, there has been some critique and adaptation of Arnstein's participation ladder. Hurlbert and Gupta (2015) compare it to the concept of information flow, whereby low levels of information can be equated to Arnstein's levels one, manipulation and two, therapy. They also address the 'levels of public involvement' by Dorcey et al. (1994), which compares low levels of citizen involvement with information or education, while higher levels of involvement are implemented with the goal of building consensus between actors.

This shift towards 'governmental participation' or 'participatory governance' underlines the changing role of decision-makers. It has been particularly noticeable and explained in the Dutch context (see Meijer and van der Krabben, 2018; Meijer and Syssner, 2017; Ubels et al., 2019a), who can be regarded forerunners in this regard. In a way, the tides are turning, as citizens are no longer "just" the consumers of urban planning, but are increasingly become producers, too. In fact, governmental actors now rather participate in planning processes initiated by citizens and embody the role of facilitators. These developments are summarized by a plethora of buzzwords, amongst which the following are very prominent: "participation society", "do-it-yourself", "civic initiatives", "participatory government", "do-democracy", "big society" and "active citizenship". This increased interest and attention to civic society can be traces across many countries in Europe. Overarchingly, the European Union institutionalized the expression "active citizenship" as an umbrella term for increased civic action, describing the "strength of civil society". Based on the data of the European Commission, the Netherlands exceed other EU member states by large according to the percentage of participation in formal and informal activities (Matyushkina et al., 2023). White's (1996, p. 7) explanation of interests in participation describes this development as "transformative participation". Transformative participation thereby results in empowerment of community members and changes structures and processes that have led to their exclusion. Already in 1996, White pointed to the politics of participation, the hidden agendas that can rest behind traditional forms of participation, highlighting

[2]Common forms of participation include public hearings or participatory budgeting

the divide between the powerful and powerless actors. In this regard, active citizenship offers possibilities to address and amplify the transformative capacity of civic involvement.

The discourse on active citizenship has experienced particular interest, predominantly in neo-liberal Western European states, after the financial crisis and related budget austerity in welfare provision (van Dam et al., 2015). Albeit a very young and innovative concept, it can represent a contested issue with regard to the subjectification of citizens. In their study on three cases, van Dam et al. (2015) highlight how governmental organizations favor citizen's initiatives that correspond with their objectives, and initiatives that are formally organized, leading to a distorted acceptance of active citizens. Nevertheless, active citizenship can also have essential transformative character, as the questions of how cities should be governed tends to be a key concern for active citizens (Hendrik Wagenaar et al., 2015).

Several arguments for supporting active citizenship can be discussed. With regard to shrinking cities, an economic and political view underline the need for active citizenship. Shrinkage can and often is a politically sensitive issue. As highlighted by Ročak (2019), trust of civil society on local governments tends to be very weak, as crucial decisions are oftentimes taken behind closed doors. In critical moments, such as shrinkage, this significantly weakens the bond between formal and informal actors. In this regard, Hurenkamp et al. (2011) argue that active citizenship can trigger ways to (re)establish such trust issues. Active citizenship implicitly can create new relationships and partnerships between governmental actors and citizens through increased involvement of citizens in the discussion of crucial matters. Scholars argue that by working together, politicians acquire a "human scale" on the one hand, and citizens learn to communicate realistic goals more effectively (Hurenkamp et al., 2011; Fung and Wright, 2001). Nevertheless, trust can be a contested issue in collaborative settings due to cooptation potential (Frantzeskaki and Rok, 2018) and close attention should be paid to the context in which active citizenship or civic action in general, emerges. For example, the Netherlands require active citizenship by the so-called participation law, and therefore construct a rather top-down demand. In other countries of Western Europe, active citizenship is a more loosely suggested and encouraged concept and relies heavily on bottom-up formation of interest groups. Importantly, as Ročak et al. (2016a) highlight in their analysis on civic action in shrinking cities, civic society comes in after politics and the market have withdrawn, making active citizenship a very contested topic. In a similar line, Hospers (2014, p. 1517) asks: "[..] how can one explain to citizens that they have to get active, when their neighborhood is simultaneously deteriorating […]"? In addition, civic engagement is often demanded while the context and formal framework practically inhibits the evolvement of informal actions, making active citizenship a long bureaucratic process which stops citizens from getting active in the first place.

Therefore, municipalities and governmental figures are key actors in matters related to active citizenship and collaborative forms of governments.

On the other hand, socio-economic arguments for active citizenship become very evident in shrinking environments as well. Shrinking cities are places that are faced with tight financial and human resources. Budgets for the upkeep of different kinds of infrastructures are lacking while sufficient resources for keeping civil servants employed are also deficient, leading to a wide spectrum of challenges. The economic performance of shrinking cities is topic of discussion amongst policy makers especially. At the same time, Putnam (2007) points to the potentials of economic growth, if citizens become active, in the sense of entrepreneurial opportunities. However, such arguments can led to an unproportionally high focus on active citizen ship, as they have in the Netherlands, and viewed as an alternative to government-led projects that foster quality of life (Bakker et al., 2012).

From a socio-economic and political point of view, active citizenship does apply to the conditions of shrinkage. However, active citizenship is a two-way street and requires action from the top and bottom. It can be argued, that shrinkage accelerates the need for an even more active role of the municipality in this regard. As Hospers (2014) explained, empowering citizens by ensuring the appropriate channels for their initiatives and to some extent, requesting action, are crucial in shrinking cities. Only then, citizens can fulfil their role as agents taking up challenges that address the public and pursue their interests and become the "energetic society" (Hajer et al., 2015) that is able to contribute to urban transformation.

## 9.3 EXPERIMENTS IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT: EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE OR GOVERNANCE EXPERIMENTATION?

Living labs, transition hubs or innovation districts are just two of the many experimental approaches that have spread around the world within the last years (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013; Bulkeley et al., 2019; Evans, 2016). They proliferated as a reaction to urban challenges that are getting ever more complex and need quick, innovative and sustainable solutions (Eneqvist and Karvonen, 2021), because "complex problems commonly resist policy interventions, ignore optimization efforts, and frustrate even the most well-intentioned policies" (Frantzeskaki et al., 2018, p. 44). Some of the first academic reviews on the topic emerged in 2007 by Powell and Vasudevan and were expanded in 2012 by Last and Kullman in 2013. Since then, singular and fragmented experiments have morphed into the "experimental city", a buzzword under which new governance approaches and arrangements

are trialed, urban living laboratories are indispensable and innovative grassroot projects are seen on a regular basis. In fact, experimental governance is increasingly becoming a strategy in some cities, as experiments are implemented in strategic ways. The pioneering scholars in this regard, Bulkeley and Castán Broto (2013) call it “governance by experiment”.

However, as “hot” as experimenting is currently, there is lacking evidence to it being a systematic way of governing. Similarly, the theoretical embedding and framing of experimental governance is rather unclear and the existing literature seems scattered. Scholars Laakso, Berg and Annala (2017) have conducted a meta-study of articles on the topic and define the following key functions of experimental governance: testing, creating profound influence (learning and changing practices), multiplying influence (experimenting beyond the niche) and promoting systemic change. More importantly, Laakso et al. (2017) develop a model of experimental governance that illustrates the vertical and horizontal dynamics of experimentation (see Figure 10). Vertically the model explains that experiments stem from challenges that are taking place on a macro level. Such challenges are downscaled and worked on through experiments on a local level. On the other hand, experiments that take place on a micro level (place based) can be scaled up and trigger systemic changes that go beyond the experiment itself (see also Hodson and Marvin, 2010). Horizontally, the model shows how social, institutional or physical contexts influence experimentation. It therefore is interesting to investigate governance arrangements against this model even further.

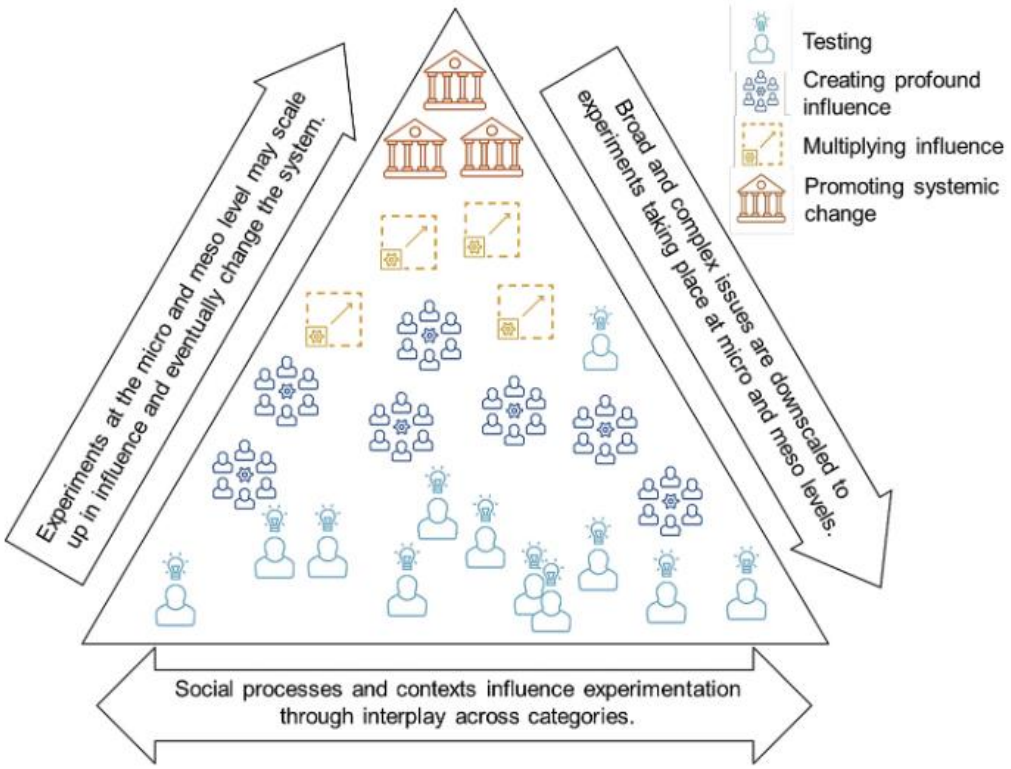


Figure 10. Model of experimental governance. Laakso et al. (2017)

Experimental governance is understood as a distinct form of collaborative and innovative approaches to governance. As a participative and empowering process, experimentation can be considered a "socially innovative" practice (Edwards-Schachter et al., 2012). In a first step, a differentiation between experiments and experimental governance has to take place. Experimentation in the urban sphere has evolved to a now very common method to try out solutions for complex problems and experiments have become a widely discussed topic in policy documents and even serve as branding tools. However, as highlighted by Potjer (2019, p. 23) and the Urban Futures Studio at Utrecht University:

*"Experimental Governance is not about what happens within an experiment, but about everything that takes place around it, everything that allows experiments to actually contribute to broad structural changes."*

Experimental governance therefore, goes beyond a singular intervention in the urban realm, but addresses structural issues that have led to the need for such experiments. The plethora of experiments implemented in various fields and the changes they trigger, have led to the framing of this process as experimental governance by Bulkeley and Castán Broto (2013). Several characteristics can be traced throughout these urban experiments:

(i) sustainability goals,
(ii) innovative methods,
(iii) place-based approaches,
(iv) co-creation, and
(v) empowerment.

The achieved or desired outcomes can have the form of products, systems, services or processes (Bulkeley et al., 2016) and contribute to knowledge production and trigger new discourses, but also change policies or existing technologies (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013). This makes urban experimentation a versatile approach. These five characteristics of experimental governance serve as analytical points for the empirical research carried out in this project.

Bulkeley and Castán Broto (2013) outline three forms of experimental governance: first, policy innovation as part of overnance experiments; second, socio-technical experiments that emerge in niches or as grassroot innovations; and third, living laboratories. Living labs especially, have gained popularity recently, although they can be traced back to the scholars of the Chicago School in the early twentieth century and their argument to comprehend the city as a social laboratory (Karvonen and van Heur, 2014). Living labs originate from classic product-testing sites and have since evolved to

spaces for tackling complex real-life challenges. Scholars argue that living labs have a unique ability to contribute to knowledge production across the involved parties due to the very collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of such trial-and-error approaches (Karvonen and van Heur, 2014). Additionally, a living laboratory is not a confined space, as the name suggests, but depends on the interaction with society and the urban realm and therefore 'real-world' problems. Knowledge production and transfer are therefore inherent to living laboratories. Nevertheless, I argue that although living labs have received major attention in research, planning and policy making, policy and niche innovation are equally as important and ubiquitous and make up a great part of experimental governance over all.

Although experiments receive a lot of attention for their efforts to work differently, collaboratively and in an innovative way, it seems like they vanish as soon as the project is over or funding has expired. Potjer (2019, p. 9) argues: "[…] experiments seldom extend beyond short-lived practices with limited societal impact, even though experiments could have the power to offer effective solutions to the most difficult societal challenges we face today." The afterlife of experiments, the stimulation of long-lasting effects and generation of broad impact seem to be neglected in a fast-paced urban society, making them "geographically and temporally bounded" (Karvonen, 2018, p. 201).

The discourse around urban experimentation seems to be at its beginnings. Arguments differ to a great extent and do not add to a joint understanding of what really makes up experimental governance. On the one hand, as argued by Karvonen (2018), experiments already constitute a governance mode themselves. On the other, Potjer (2019) clearly argues that experimental governance goes far beyond the experiment itself. Interestingly, Castán Broto and Bulkeley (2013) find that sometimes experiments do not have the intention to change governance arrangements, but unintentionally disrupt current societal structures potentially leading to reinventing governance. Summarizing, the understanding of experimental governance in this thesis is the following:

*"A collection or sequence of experimental actions that include different types of actors and intentionally or by accident trigger processes of change and adaptation that go beyond the intervention itself."*

Through trial-and-error and learning-by-doing, they offer alternative and innovative ways to govern change and cohesively alter governance approaches. Sanderson (2009) argues, that experimentation is a useful method to accommodate and deal with uncertainty and explore adaptation to changing circumstances (Ansell and Bartenberger, 2016). Experimental governance therefore can be understood as an adaptive process, too. In this regard, Eneqvist and Karvonen (2021) have

underlined the important strategic function of municipalities that goes beyond their involvement in singular experiments. In the following chapter, municipalities as key actors are explored further.

## 9.4 MUNICIPALITIES AS KEY AGENTS

Collaborative arrangements, as the cornerstone of experimental governance, are characterized by being multi-actor arrangements, often referred to as "triple helix" or "quadruple helix" partnerships (Bulkeley et al., 2016; Eneqvist et al., 2022). Triple helix partnerships include the public and private sector as well as academic partners, whereas a quadruple helix collaborations involve citizens additionally (Cai and Lattu, 2022), seeking innovative and co-created solutions. Interestingly, municipalities are key actors in the majority of experimental projects. Such multi-actor collaborations portray a development in urban governance that changes the role of these actor-groups: municipalities[3] are stepping down from their traditional power function and role as main decision maker, that used to shape urban development. Experimental governance additionally strengthens this changing role of the municipality, making them a partner, facilitator and leader (Castán Broto and Bulkeley, 2013; Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren, 2018), and protector of public values (Sørensen et al., 2021). It therefore challenges the role of the "planner" or public servant, as well as technocratic planning practices to rethink traditional practices and how planning and urban development is understood in general.

Although experimental governance is on the rise, Eneqvist and Karvonen (2021) find in their study that this innovation is not replacing traditional forms of governance, but expanding and informing existing policies. Municipalities at their core, are still organized formally within a legal framework, but informality plays a role through aspects such as collaboration and informal relationships. However, the influence of a municipality within a multi-actor collaboration is particular. They are a stable institution with formal and legal decision-making power (Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren, 2018). Controversies can therefore potentially arise if such an actor is involved in a multi-actor collaboration that aims to co-create decisions. Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren (2018) also point out that the role of the municipality can vary not only from one project or experiment to another, but also within the timeline of a project and within different actors within the municipal organization. The authors highlight two particular roles of municipalities within such multi-actor arrangements: involvement in the application

[3] In this work, municipality is referred to as the administrative and political organization of a bounded territory that has decision-making power. Synonymously, local government is used.

for external funding, such as EU, state or regional funds, on the one hand, and facilitating or governing the collaboration, on the other. These roles, or capacities, of the municipality are very contrasting with regard to the question whether they are an actor in “collaborative governance” arrangements, or, if they are “governing collaboration” (Vangen et al., 2015). This distinction can be useful to investigate the interest of the municipality within a partnership. At the same time, with regard to the findings of Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren (2018), such a distinction can vary throughout the process and within different sections of the municipal organization.

Summarizing, the role of municipalities in experimental governance is important, but can lead to tensions within the organization and also regarding their role within the multi-actor partnership. Research on the capacity, or role, of the municipality in experimental governance is limited, but has so far shed light onto the complexity of the potentials and barriers that a governmental organization with legal decision-making power can have. Relating to already posed questions of power distribution, transparency, democratic accountability, on the one hand, and aspects of institutional change and learning on the other, this thesis elaborates further on the existing research on experimental governance and the role of the municipality in the critical context of shrinkage by taking a close look on how experimental governance emerges and evolves.

## 9.5 SUMMARY: INNOVATION IN GOVERNANCE WITHIN A COMPLEX SETTING

It is no secret, that public administrations are undergoing serious changes in the way they are organized and their way of working. They are faced with increasingly complex challenges and wicked problems that change and evolve quickly (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012; Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, 2011; Eva Sørensen and Jacob Torfing, 2016). Such societal challenges do not respond well enough to the traditional way of static administration (Bryson et al., 2014), technocratic planning, long processes and visions. Traditional public administration has started to shift with the rise of New Public Management (Hood, 1991) in the 1970s and 1980s and therefore the introduction private sector into public government processes. Private sector models were sought after to make up for the short comings of public administration. Soon after, other models started to supersede, such as "New Public Governance" (Osborne, 2006) or "Public Value Governance" (Bryson et al., 2014), putting forward approaches that value citizens at their core. More recently even, it has been recognized, that the New Public Management model has failed because of the serious lack of interactive and dynamic relations between citizens, service users and public administrations (Osborne, 2018). The newer models, such as New Public Governance, and others following, tend to focus on collaborative modes to create the desired value and view citizens as co-producers. Here, experimental governance can be located as one of the newer models of management approaches, amongst other formats such as collaborative innovation networks or co-production.

This evolution to todays' multi-facetted and multi-layered governance model, that dominates many Western European countries, has led to a complexity within the governance system that partly still holds onto traditional hierarchical institutions and legal authority but ventures out to multi-actor collaborative approaches at the same time. It is therefore necessary to always consider governance within a setting of different actors and within a dynamic and everchanging process. A post-structuralist view goes hand in hand with an experimental governance model, by (i) overcoming restrictive barriers or limitations of governments, (ii) using the micro-scale as point of departure while still considering macro-influences that might trigger or accelerate certain processes, (iii) acknowledging the many ways of new assemblages and networks within the specific institutional settings, (iv) highlighting how leading actors at different scales can co-evolve more horizontally and (v) analyzing how actants adjust and evolve within the (changing) settings. (Boelens and Roo, 2014).

In light of the complexity of shrinkage, innovations in governance offer an exciting promise to differently approach the existing challenges. A post-structuralist view looks at the processes, dynamics and relations between actors under the circumstances of population loss and economic downturn. It

regards shrinking cities as ‘complex adaptive systems’ that are open systems and therefore open to change, non-linear, dynamic and unstable. Shrinkage is believed, in a positive way, to provide transformative conditions (Roo, 2018) for positive change to take place. Economic decline, increased uncertainty, change in population and demography and politics can be regarded as such transformative conditions. These mentioned transformative situations are slow and contingent (Roo, 2018) and offer windows of opportunity for change and adaptation. It is precisely the interest of this project to find out what the transformative conditions, the encouraging factors, are in the shrinking cities of Heerlen, the Netherlands, and Halle(Saale), Germany, that have led to a change in governance structures.

# PART D: THE EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVE. INTRODUCING THE SHRINKING CITIES HEERLEN, THE NETHERLANDS AND HALLE(SAALE), GERMANY

Understanding experimental governance in shrinking cities can seem rather abstract in the first place. The cases of Heerlen and Halle(Saale) are introduced in this chapter to make cases for this topic and bring forth tangible examples for such processes. This is done by providing answers to the research questions: 1) Who are the actors involved in experimental governance processes and what type of relationships have they established? 2) How are forms of experimental governance emerging in shrinking cities and what factors are crucial for their further evolvement? 3) In which ways can experimental forms of governance be sustained long-term? The answers are provided for each case separately (MUNICIPALITY-LED GOVERNANCE CHANGES: EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE VIA GEBROOKERBOS AND BEYOND 10 and 11) while addressing the assorted theories from PART C: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS, before they are discussed in a comparative gesture in CHAPTER 12).

# 10 MUNICIPALITY-LED GOVERNANCE CHANGES: EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE VIA GEBROOKERBOS AND BEYOND IN HEERLEN, THE NETHERLANDS

Choosing a case study in the Netherlands based on the rate of active citizenship should not be difficult as the country shows the highest level of participation in formal (40.2%) and informal (82.3%) volunteering activities among all EU members states (Matyushkina et al., 2023) as well as a high active citizenship rate (25.2%). However, shrinking cities are not the first places to think of, when speaking about active citizenship. Given the fact, that in the most flourishing time of the city, the 1960s, where Heerlen was the richest city in the Netherlands, life was largely revolving around the mining industry and was organized by the industry as well. This meant that a society was shaped that was not provided with crucial moments for the rise of participation and active citizenship. Rather, the Catholic Church together with officials of the mining industry dominated the sociocultural and economic structure of the region (Hoekveld and Bontje, 2016). The rapid closure of the mines in 1965 came by surprise, but with the promise of providing enough jobs, people looked forward to a transformation. Many factors were responsible for an economic stagnation and subsequent job losses and a negatively affected socioeconomic status of the city (Ročak, 2019). Amongst these, a "mental setback" (Elzerman and Bontje, 2015, p. 93) due to the lost mining identity, mono-sectoral dependence, low birth rates and selective outmigration were driving factors of Heerlen's path of shrinking.

Heerlen today is known as *the* "symbol of urban shrinkage" in the Netherlands (Ročak, 2019, p. 706). It is the only urbanized are in the Netherlands that has faced shrinkage, and is expected to again loose population in the future (CBS, 2022), with some other regions at the edge of the country facing similar challenges. The rest of the country however, is expected to grow continuously, mainly due to migration (CBS, 2023).

## 10.1 THE SHRINKING CITY OF HEERLEN: AN INTRODUCTION

Heerlen is located in the southeast of the Netherlands (Figure 11), within the province of Limburg. Limburg boarders Germany and Belgium, with Heerlen being in very close proximity to the Germany city of Aachen and general closeness to the boarder of the Netherlands and Germany. With the center of power and administrative importance being located in The Hague, South Holland, and Amsterdam, North Holland, Heerlen is positioned far away from politically important locations in the Netherlands.


Figure 11. Localization of Heerlen within the Netherlands. Author's own.

Administratively, Heerlen is a city and a municipality and part of the city-region of Parkstad Limburg, which encompasses a total of seven municipalities (Heerlen, Beekdaelen, Brunssum, Landgraaf, Kerkrade, Simpelveld, and Voerendaal) (Figure 12).

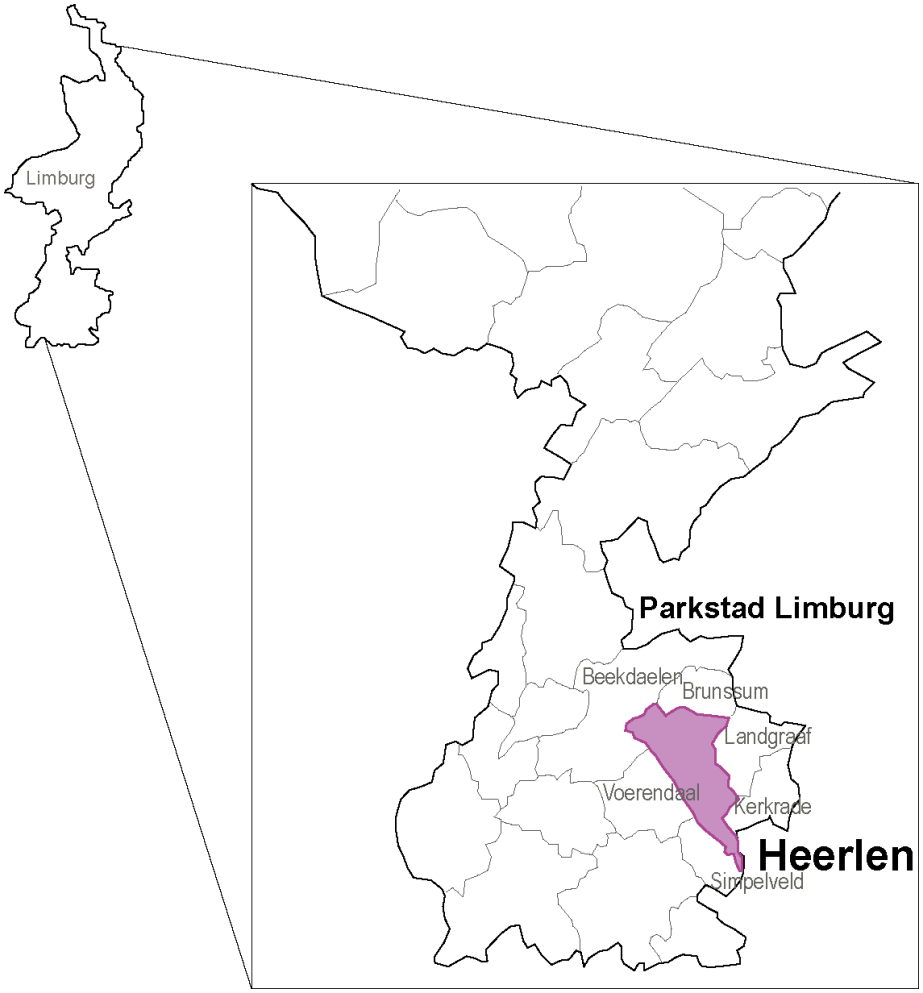


Figure 12. Localization of Heerlen within Parkstad Limburg. Author's own.

## *POPULATION AND ECONOMIC DYNAMICS*

Before the 19th century, Heerlen was a rural area, shaped largely by agriculture. During the late 19th century however, mining became the main economic activity and transformed the site of small villages to a merged city of Heerlen. At the beginning of the 20th century, large-scale mining started (Hoekveld and Bontje, 2016) and Heerlen experienced a fast growth from around 5,000 inhabitants in 1900 to 95,000 inhabitants in 1995 (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009). The geographical and economic growth of Heerlen was very much connected and dependent on the mining industry, which made Heerlen the richest city in the Netherlands in the 1960s (Ročak,

2019; Neimed, n.d.). Mining workers came not only from different parts of the Netherlands, but also from all over Europe (especially Poland, Greece, Spain or Italy), shaping a “melting pot of various domestic and foreign guest workers” (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009, p. 19).

Wealth, prosperity and growth were therefore attached to the stability of the mining operations, which was brought to a halt when natural gas was discovered in the north of the Netherlands in 1959, impeding the continuity of the mining industry in Heerlen (VanHoose et al., 2021). Finally on December 17 1965 (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009), the government announced the end of coal mining in the Netherlands with the promise to provide jobs to make up for tens of thousands job losses associated with mining (Hoekveld and Bontje, 2016). All coal mining sites were shut down between 1965 and 1974, leading to long-term economic and population decline.

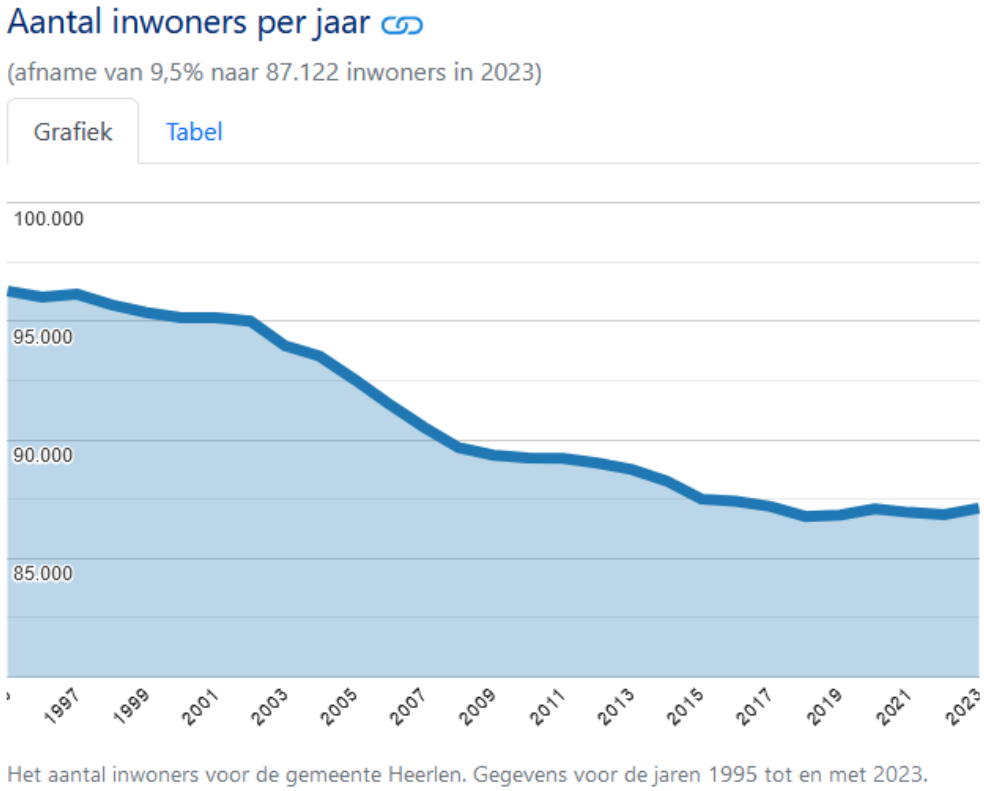


Figure 13. Population development in Heerlen 1997-2023. Source: AlleCijfers.nl (retrieved from https://allecijfers.nl/gemeente/heerlen/)

This initial decline in the 1970s was interrupted by a short period of stabilization until the 1990s. However, as Figure 13 shows, population decline commenced again in the late 1990s, and continued as a structural challenge until recently. The latest prognosis for Heerlen points to future population

decline that is expected to start again in 2030 and continue onwards, while the Netherlands as a country are expected to grow (Figure 14).

The closure of the mining industry had a substantial impact not only on the economy of the area, but also on the social life of the inhabitants because they played a significant role in the organization of health care or social activities and took care of most of the families' needs (Ročak et al., 2016b). Mining companies therefore were key actors in the governing of the areas and the prosperity of the mining industries was tied to the urbanization of Heerlen. As Ročak et al. (2016b, p. 382) write, this lead "[…] to a strong socio-spatial dependency between the labor population and the mines". The second key actor became the Roman Catholic Church, who together with the mining companies pursued to create a community consisting of hard and obedient workers without leaving much room for uprising. This particular composition of governance one the one hand provided mining workers with good housing, security, social and cultural facilities and their own vegetable gardens. The residents were organized in so-called "colonies", with a strong focus on the particular neighborhoods. Connections to the city as a whole were therefore not that prominent (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009).

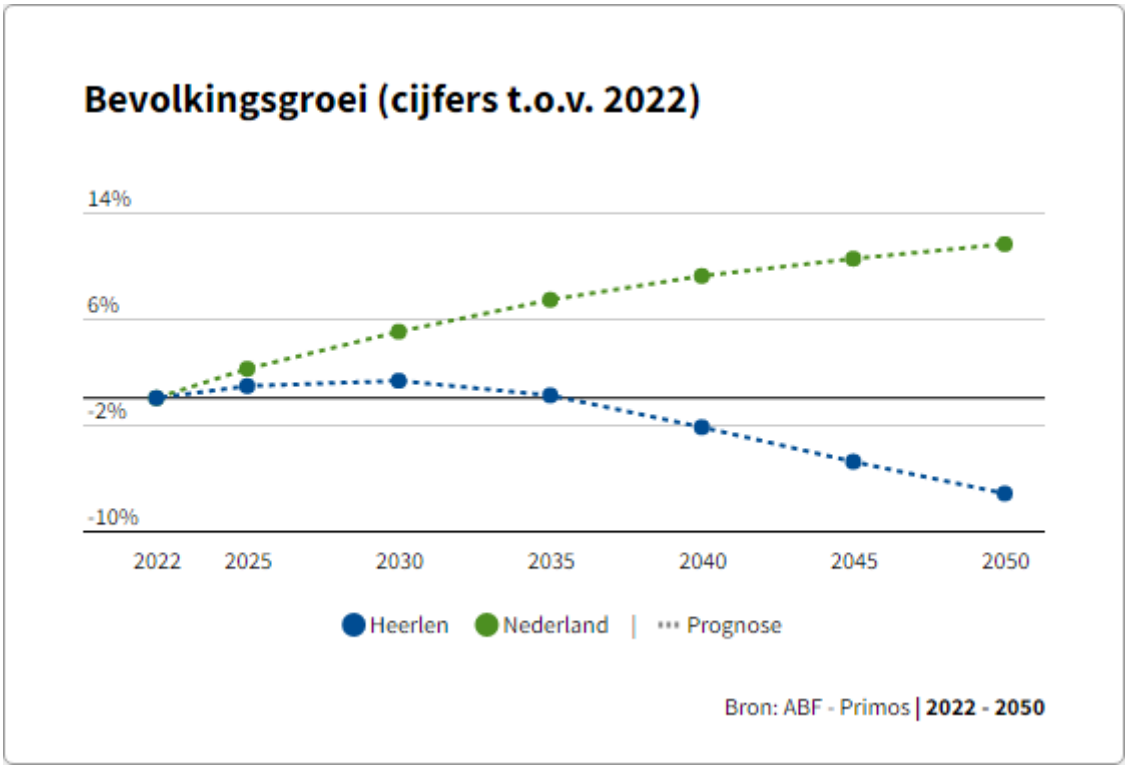


Figure 14. Population forecast for Heerlen and the Netherlands 2022-2050. Source: Parkstad in Cijfers (retrieved from https://parkstad.incijfers.nl/dashboard/prognoses)

The closure of the mines took place rapidly, and had significant effects on the society and economy of the region. Concerning the population, there was a “wait-and-see” (Ročak, 2019, p. 708) mentality as the role of the Church dropped and this also triggered unemployment, because mining workers were used to work within a strict but familiar system that was telling them what to do, but also intense drug abuse, crime and prostitution (VanHoose et al., 2021). Any form of participation or co-creation between citizens and the municipality was not on the radar in the years after the closures. As Ročak (2019) reports, the shutdown of the mining industry took place by decision of the national and local government and the industries. Without consulting residents and workers, they felt excluded, which led to a serious trust issue towards public institutions. The political culture however, has always been different to other parts of the Netherlands (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009). It has been shaped by orders and top-down policies which made it very difficult to gain trust from inhabitants. But also the other way round, since residents were never involved in decision-making, it was difficult for them to finally receive recognition.

The situation in Heerlen drastically changed to the worse due to the increased drug use problem soon after the mines were closed. VanHoose et al. (2021, p. 3) call it the “heroin epidemic in the Netherlands”, that started in Heerlen. However, the substance abuse issues can not only be linked to abrupt structural changes in the city, but can be also associated with the arrival of the US military base Afcent in South Limburg. In Afcent US soldiers were stationed who, during their serving time in Vietnam, came into contact with heroin (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009). In addition, the close proximity to Germany and Belgium and especially the direct train connection between Heerlen and the city of Aachen, Germany made the exchange of drugs across borders easily possible. Paired with the high rates of unemployment and economic recession, a rather pessimistic mood shaped the city during the years after the closure of the mines.

Table 1. Share of population 75 years and above.
Source: Parkstad in Cijfers. (retrieved from https://parkstad.incijfers.nl/dashboard/prognoses)

| | 2022 | 2025 | 2030 | 2035 | 2040 | 2045 | 2050 | Gemiddelde |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Heerlen | 10,8% | 11,9% | 13,4% | 15,2% | 17,0% | 18,1% | 17,9% | 14,8% |
| Nederland | 8,9% | 9,9% | 11,2% | 12,3% | 13,6% | 14,6% | 15,1% | 12,3% |

Heerlen experienced high rates of selective outmigration (Latten and Musterd, 2009) of young and/or educated people. This means, that young people were leaving Heerlen in search for a better education elsewhere and in hope to find employment elsewhere, too. Or, educated people were leaving Heerlen looking for a better job. This brain-drain had significant influence on the entrepreneurship level in Heerlen, and still to this date it is a concerning matter. Today, Heerlen has

stabilized its population, however demographic change is taking over and leaving behind an ageing population, decreasing household sizes and high rates of vacancy. Already today, the share of the population of 75 years and above, is significantly higher than the country average and the gap is expected to grow even further.

## 10.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF CITIZEN INVOLVMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

Civic involvement is not new to the Netherlands. Within the context of spatial planning, forms of participation can be traced back to the 1960s. It was at that time, when rational approaches to planning gained criticism as a result of realizing that social and societal challenges cannot be solved by technical rationality (Roo, 2010a). The increasing complexity of reality and the limits of control that planners had to deal with, accelerated the abolishment of blueprints in planning processes. Simultaneously, pioneering publications such as “Industrial Dynamics”, “Urban Dynamics” or “World Dynamics” by Jay W. Forrester in the early 1960s and early 1970s started to slowly gain attention amongst policymakers and practitioners. Tangible changes in the role of citizens in governance or spatial planning processes however, only became reality after emancipatory movements all over the world. Protests and students revolts laid the grounds for a rethinking of current practices and pushed for a different rationale for planning; a rationale that would take into account different values and social groups, called “advocacy planning” (see Davidoff, 1965).

These global developments have made their way in Dutch policy making as well. With the introduction of The Spatial Planning Act in 1965, which paved the way for participatory planning. Citizens were given opportunity to voice their opinions on plans within a defined space and time, so called public hearings. This development triggered changes in planning processes, as they had to become more flexible, in order to implement changes voiced by citizens. However, participatory planning quickly reached its limits with regard to real participation. As Davidoff (1965) already stated, citizens were merely invited to agree to presented plans in most cases. Much other international research shared a similar opinion on participatory planning, such as Patsy Healey, Judith Innes and Jay W. Forrester. They claimed that such a setting would not meet the democratic principles of participation and are far from satisfactory for the public.

In the 1980s, another change was introduced in the Netherlands that was inspired by planning processes in the United States: public-private-partnership. This largely market oriented approach gave opportunity to developers and market actors to enter the public sphere of spatial planning. The role

of housing associations expanded, too. Within this setting, the rationale of collaborative stakeholder and communicative planning were introduced and sometimes, notions of both were mixed. This period of planning again gained much criticism, mainly due to two reasons: collaborative stakeholder planning methods were not public and sometimes incomprehensible, while communicative planning did not focus on involving citizens, but rather emphasized restructuring of administrative and bureaucratic processes.

The most recent developments regarding citizen participation in the Netherlands have been subject to major criticism. In the Queen' Speech of 1999, the term 'active citizenship' emerged, and was picked up again in the King's Speech of 2013. It states: "It is an undeniable reality that in today's network and information society people are both more assertive and more independent than in the past. This, combined with the need to reduce the budget deficit, means that the classical welfare state is slowly but surely evolving into a participation society. Everyone who is able will be asked to take responsibility for their own lives and immediate surroundings." (Royal House of the Netherlands, 2013)

The years before and after this speech were marked by the emergence of various terms around this topic, such as "good citizenship", "Do-Democracy", "participation society", "self-organization", "do-it-yourself", or "participatory government". The announcement by the King marked a very important point in the governance of the Netherlands. Decentralization of state powers not only to the local, but the individual level has promised to open doors for interest of citizens to become reality, but also demanded personal responsibility for neighborhoods and the common good. Evidently, this has sparked criticism. De Wilde et al. (2014) for example find, that governmental and civic mechanisms and ways of working not always match and therefore hinder civic initiatives, their upscaling or changes in governance. Frantzeskaki et al. (2016) highlight that in this case, citizens rather have to adapt to current circumstances in order to realize their initiatives. If relationships between governments and citizens are changed and strengthened, institutions need to get out of their comfort zone and "stretch" beyond their traditional practices (ibid.).

Additionally, in 2006 teaching citizenship in primary and secondary education has become a compulsory component of the curriculum (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2013). It lays the grounds for active participation in society from a very young age and teaches how society works in order to foster the citizenship thought as intrinsic motivation.

Summarizing, the Netherlands show a historical tradition of participation that has accelerated the development of cooperative relations between citizens and the government (Wilde et al., 2014). Based on EU data, the Netherlands show one of the highest percentages of participation in formal and informal volunteering activities and active citizenship in Europe (Matyushkina et al., 2023). Dutch

participation and civic involvement largely follows utilitarian and egalitarian goals, and citizens are not seeking individual advantages or gains from getting involved in initiatives (Wilde et al., 2014). Therefore, as Wilde et al. (2014) state, most Dutch citizens do not see their involvement as a political act, but rather a social one.

However, the strong welfare traditions of state have not only experienced a turn over due to austerity policies and top-down regulations that demand civic involvement, but also an increasing entrepreneurial interest of Dutch citizens has had an impact. Therefore, governance mechanisms and organizational structures have been adapted to support these changes.

## 10.3 REVITALIZATION EFFORTS

The closure of the mines had an immense effect on many aspects of life in Heerlen. Most prominently, unemployment rates skyrocketed. In order to fulfill their promise of providing jobs for the lost mining work, the economic restructuring plan of 1965 for the South Limburg region (Nota inzake de mijnindustrie en de industriele herstructurering van Zuid-Limburg) was implemented. The plan foresaw the creation of industrial businesses and employment via the relocation of public institutions. Several national institutes were moved to Heerlen, such as the national statistics office, a large pension fund and the Open University. However, these jobs did not match the blue-collar workers in a qualitative but also quantitative manner (Hoekveld and Bontje, 2016). A series of revitalization efforts that tackled different issues were implemented. This chapter provides an analysis and discussion of those initiatives and policies with regard to (experimental) governance processes and structures in a chronological order. This is important in order to understand the complex situation of the role of residents in governance in Heerlen.

### *APPROACHES TO SHRINKAGE ON A NATIONAL LEVEL*

Population decline in the Netherlands has an interesting trajectory that is similar to other countries that have experienced the industrial revolution in the 19$^{th}$ century and since then based their decisions on growth. Previous, very prosperous regions, such as South Limburg, became shrinking areas almost overnight. One of the first studies on structural population decline in the region was commissioned by the secretaries of the Council for Transport, Public Works and Water Management and the VROM Council in 2006. This study was directed by Derks et al. and triggered the discourse on demographic decline and addressed potential consequences, leading to the topic being put on the

national political agenda and an intense public and academic debate (Verwest, 2011). Population decline affected not only the region of South Limburg, but also East Groningen and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and in 2008 a study on the financial consequences of population decline for municipalities was published. This study highlighted that a reform of the structural grant system was necessary in order for municipalities to be able to deal with the consequences adequately. In the same year, another study was published that focused on the effects of population decline on the housing market. Additionally, a change in the ministry of housing and an increased media attention for the published studies stimulated the discussion and attention for population decline in the Netherlands. The new minister, Van der Laan, was invited to Heerlen, South Limburg, to experience firsthand the consequences of population decline. (Verwest, 2011)

These developments led to a conclusion in form of an action plan for population decline to support municipalities in accommodating the development. However, the Dutch Cabinet declared, that municipalities are responsible for developing policies and adequately dealing with population decline and shrinkage. Moreover, since shrinkage is a regional phenomenon in the Netherlands, with some parts of provinces being affected, and others not, municipalities that experience shrinkage rely heavily on national funding (Ivanov, 2021). Since the action plan was introduced, many initiatives and programs emerged, that focused on informing different societal groups about shrinkage and the potentials. Even a bus tour to shrinking municipalities was organized by the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), to show on site, how the shrinking areas look like and how they are developing. (Verwest, 2011) Moreover, shrinkage made it not only onto the policy agenda, but proliferated in the academic discourse. Conferences were organized on the subject, and special editions in academic journals were dedicated to shrinkage.

## *SHRINK WITH QUALITY: A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN*

The action plan Shrink with Quality provides insights and exemplary responses to shrinkage. The shrinking regions in the Netherlands are Parkstad Limburg, North-East Groningen and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, hence the plan addresses those specifically. As first of its kind in the Netherlands, the action plan clearly acknowledges population decline in some parts of the country and that policies need to be adapted, because they are catering towards growth. More importantly, it states “Population decline in itself need not be a problem. […] Shrinkage also offers municipalities opportunities: to improve spatial quality, nature and the residential climate. A lower population density can even improve the quality of life in an area.” (Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, 2009, pp. 6–8) This is in line with many academic responses,

that argue for crises to be also urilized as “windows of opportunity” (Bernt, 2009; Coppola, 2019; Hospers, 2014), “political vacuum” (Meijer and Syssner, 2017) or “policy windows” (Kingdon, 1984; Bernt et al., 2014). In terms of Hospers’ (2014, 2013) four types of policy responses (1) trivializing shrinkage, (2) countering shrinkage, (3) accepting shrinkage and (4) utilizing shrinkage, the messages in the action plan cater towards accepting and/or utilizing shrinkage. In particular, the action plan points to opportunities regarding the loosening of tight housing markets and subsequently lower housing prices or less traffic amongst those. Importantly, the plan underlines the significance of maintaining quality of life in shrinking areas, that, without action, can be weakened and thus, places people and their well-being at the center of attention.

Further, the action plan does not recommend attracting new residents as strategy for shrinking cities. This would lead to even more competitive conditions in the region. The plan also discusses the need for adapting processes in shrinking cities, and stresses that action needs to be carried out by the municipality, and more importantly, by municipalities of a region together. The central government however, is actively involved in accommodating shrinkage. However, the action plan mentions also which strategies have not worked in cities such as Heerlen: “Experience has also shown that government policy aimed at, for example, transferring government services to the regions has not had the intended result.” (Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, 2009, p. 10)

This is important, because it stresses the significance of innovative and place-based solutions for such areas that need to be tailored to the altered circumstances. According to the action plan, experimentation in shrinking regions is desired to come up with new ideas. In some of the shrinking regions, research labs have been implemented with a variety of participants working together. As an important insight of the action plan, several actions in different municipalities are listed, that range from bottom-up to more formal measures. Being an important policy document, the action plan provides inspiration on how to approach shrinkage and associated challenges, without declaring it a problem to be solved. It sums up three conditions for an effective approach to shrinkage: timely local awareness (i), clear division of administrative roles between municipalities, regions and provinces, the national government as well as social actors (ii), and lastly, an effective funding system (iii). Further, the action plan proposes a set of short- and long-term actions that serve as a guideline for how to structure sectoral policies, actions and measures.

## *LOCAL RESPONSES: OPERATION HEARTBEAT*

Under the title “from black to green” (VanHoose et al., 2021, p. 3) different types of policies were implemented with the goal to transform the area by focusing heavily on branding and tourism. Amongst those, “Operation Hearbeat” (Operatie Hartslag) was implemented in 2001 and “Actionplan Shrinking with Quality” (Actieplan Krimpen met Kwaliteit) followed in 2009. Operation Heartbeat emerged largely out of the critical challenges associated with the use of hard drugs such as drug-related deaths, quality of life and safety in the city center. This initiative was led by the municipal administration, in cooperation with the policy, healthcare institutions and other actors. Operation Heartbeat had a main area of action, the train station, which until the initiative came to life, was regarded as the most unsafe train station in the Netherlands (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009). This led to the Dutch Railway Company, NS (Nederlandse Spoorwegen’s), threatening with the closure of the train station in Heerlen.

However, with Operation Heartbeat, not only the critical challenges were tackled, but the governance aspect was crucial for the success. In the evaluation report of the initiative it says: “Another reality is the cooperation between professional institutions that have to grow towards each other to tackle problems together.” (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009, p. 14) The report highlights the importance of the shift in governance, particularly between government institutions and citizens, that required hard work and struggle from all actors, particularly concerning the adjustment of methods and processes that were already in place. Before Operation Heartbeat was implemented, new Mayor Alexander Sakkers was appointed, which led to a different dynamic and required creativity to approach the present issues as joint forces.

While Operation Heartbeat emerged to fight the challenges associated with increased drug-abuse and prostitution in the city center, the process of establishing Operation Heartbeat and previous smaller initiatives already brought several wins for the governance of Heerlen. Politically, very different positions were brought forward before Operation Heartbeat commenced: from installing policies that should address the problems via repression, to denying the issue, leading to a very chaotic state and no common structure to accommodate the challenges. Most importantly, very little commitment in the city council and courage to address certain issues was missing. However, in these turbulent times, citizens stood up and made their voices heard via protests. Albeit these protests and uprisings even led to threats that were made against some political leaders, a conversation was held for the very first time. As the evaluation report mentions: “[…] the conviction had grown that people needed each other to effectively address problems.” (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009, p. 26) With the appointment of Mayor Sakkes, a new approach was needed, that effectively

would address the persistent challenges. The methods of this approach involved increasing camera surveillance in the city center, a repressive approach by the police, cleaning the train station, closing premises or drug actions in trains. There, the importance of mediating actors became apparent in the actor constellation, with the appointed project manager of Operation Heartbeat being "[…] the hub of the project" (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009, p. 29) and crucial for the whole management of the initiative. Additionally, the police were heavily involved in Operation Hearbeat. Regarding citizen involvement, the approach of Operation Heartbeat did not involve civic society, which was highlighted in the evaluation report (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009). The team of the initiative claims that gaining the trust of the population requires time, which they did not have with this approach. Rather, they wanted to quickly implement necessary steps. In a manner of "trial and error", the method of Operation Heartbeat was tested, by putting emphasis on collaboration between actors at different levels.

Operation Heartbeat was in place from 2001 to 2003 and led to dramatically falling statistics of crime and nuisance rates. Additionally, according to a population survey, the measure of camera surveillance led to an increase in the feeling of safety. In 2004, political and personnel changes altered the program significantly. The appointment of a new chief of police, as well as a new Mayor, transformed the style of operating within Operation Heartbeat. Hierarchical structures became more vertical, and top-down instructions were superseded by communication between involved actors which established true collaborations and bridge-building. These changes marked the second phase of Operation Heartbeat.

Such an approach is in line with experimental governance, as it provided a learning culture (Potjer, 2019) of collaboration in Heerlen for the first time after the closure of the mining industries. However, the lacking civic participation, or the clear dismissal of it, are an indicator of a triple helix collaboration (Carayannis et al., 2022). Nevertheless, Operation Heartbeat can be understood as an innovative approach in its own timeline. Further, since repression was the common method of dealing with drug-users, it had a goal of empowerment of these groups. Facilities such as day and night shelters were established, in order to strengthen and provide care for users as well as long-term perspectives (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009). In line with Bulkeley and Castán Broto (2013), Operation Heartbeat did fulfill several of the characteristics of experimental governance: innovative methods, place-based approaches and empowerment, but significantly lacked to be a participative approach (Innes and Booher, 2004), which is understood to be intrinsic to experimental governance.

The changes brought by the second phase and changed personnel however, portray a different picture. By including benefit provision, inclusion in care pathways and more assistance for life perspectives in general, empowerment and inclusion grew to be more important than the previously sought-after repressive approach. In 2005, Operation Heartbeat became “Heartbeat Heerlen”, and expanded their approach and methods to another target groups, namely homeless and/or evicted people and collaborates with organizations such as schools, housing associations and tenant’s interest groups (Municipalitiy of Heerlen and Police Academy of the Netherlands, 2009). This has transformed the approach to a person-centered initiative. Heartbeat Heerlen has realized the need for a sustainable anchoring of the methodology and actively has involved citizens and entrepreneurs in the process. This shows traces of a co-creative approach, that further characterizes experimental governance according to Bulkeley and Castán Broto (2013).

## *REGIONAL PROSPECTS: A SUSTAINABLY VITAL REGION*

The action plan “Towards a sustainably vital region” is a short regional vision for the future of Parkstad Limburg until 2040, that was published in 2010. Other than the foresight until 2040, it provides a strategic outline up to 2020 and steps of implementation. The approach for the region is declared as “acceptance, anticipation and investing” (EGTS Cityregion Aachen, p. 2). Chronologically, the regional action plan suggests to first accept that population numbers are declining. Then, anticipation refers to highlighting the opportunities of the region, such as improving housing and green spaces. Lastly, investment in the sustainable economies will secure the regions vitality. In terms of Hosper’s (2013, 2014) classification, the regional action plan follows (3) accepting and (4) utilizing shrinkage.

With the plan, the municipalities of Parkstad Limburg have agreed to increase their contributions in the regional agenda. This creates a significant budget raise for project implementation at regional level. In line with Bernt (2016), who claims that research should step away from the focus on local shrinking manifestations towards dynamics that take place at the regional or national level, such regional plans can offer different perspectives as they steer the regional development towards one coherent direction. The action plan for Parkstad Limburg focusses on two pillars, the spatial and the social perspective. Spatially, targeted area development is supposed to strengthen the economy, by improving accessibility of the network city region Aachen, of which Parkstad Limburg is a member. However, investment towards the city center of Heerlen, as the center of Parkstad will also act as an accelerator to regional economic prosperity (EGTS Cityregion Aachen). The plan further recommends

the IBA as an important regional strategy to bring in new and innovative ideas and projects of social, cultural and economic nature into the area, fast.

## *POLICY STRATEGIES: GUIDING DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE*

Policy strategies for shrinkage have been out forward in the document "From combat to guidance demographic decline in the Netherlands" that has been published by the Environmental Assessment Agency of the Netherlands, PBL, in 2010. It focusses on the regions Parkstad Limburg, Eems Delta and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen and analyzes their responsive measures to shrinkage by looking at their regional economic and housing policies. Two types of policies were recognized: those that contribute to combating shrinkage, or those that supervise shrinkage. First one meaning, in Hosper's (2013, 2014) terms, (2) "countering" shrinkage, and trying to reverse the development by stimulating supply or demand to the new circumstances. In line with for example Glock & Häußermann (2004), the authors of the document have a clear stance on whether or not state intervention in the housing market and economy are necessary in shrinking regions. In structurally shrinking areas, where population decline takes place rapidly and is of substantial nature, such as Parkstad Limburg, Eems Delta and Zeeuws-Vlaanderen, the challenges of these transitions are too extensive to be solved by the market itself. These types of policies tend to be the initial reactions to population decline in regions. Increasing the variety of housing supply or housing concepts to stimulate the demand for housing or attract new groups is an example for such policies. The other type of policies, those that cater towards supervise or manage shrinkage, are more in line with "accepting" the development. Adapting construction plans to accommodate the new reality and likely an expected oversupply of built infrastructure as well as demolition strategies, are such types of policy.

In Parkstad Limburg, policies to counter shrinkage have been implemented for many years, before policy makers changed the strategy towards accepting and managing shrinkage. Therefore, in the first years of population decline, actions have been taken to attract new residents, for example by adapting the offers on the housing market paired with increased marketing campaigns for these new market options. In 2006, Parkstad Limburg shifted towards coordinating construction plans on a regional level in order to manage the distribution of housing supply accordingly. Additionally, agreements for restructuring and demolition of surplus hosing stock have been made in the region to adapt it to the new demand. This way, vacancy can be avoided. These policies to some extent follow some experimental governance characteristics, because in that time, they were innovative and followed a collaborative understanding of measures to be taken on the regional housing market. The document stresses, that new actor coalitions need to emerge in shrinking areas in order to approach certain

issues adequately and especially, when working on a regional level. In Parkstad Limburg, various social organizations and market actors were involved in formulating the regional residential vision. This is an indication, that the policies emerged from a collaborative dialogue with different stakeholders and might have followed a "quadruple helix" design of collaboration (Cai and Lattu, 2022).

However, Hoekstra et al. (2020) highlight in their research on housing inequalities in shrinking cities, that housing interventions by the state can influence spatial segregation. This is due to such interventions being very spatially focused and therefore selective (ibid.). Therefore, they conclude that sociospatial inequalities can be accelerated, if growth-oriented policies still dominate the landscape in depopulating areas. As such, the construction of the Maankwartier in Heerlen, a mainly owner-occupied and expensive rental housing inner-city area, serves as an example that was planned to stimulate the image of the city (Matoga, 2022). The Maankwartier is located in the train-station area of the city, that used to be one of the most marginalized urban quarter and triggered many discussions regarding social inequalities in the city. The re-development of the railway station and construction of the Maankwartier dates back to 2008, when the Masterplan for this area was developed. It was subsidized by the European Fund for Regional Development, the ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment and the province of Limburg with a total sum of 40 million Euros (Maankwartier Heerlen, n.d.).

Further, the document draws up some key governance mechanisms that were put in place to support the three regions in their transition phase from combating to accepting shrinkage. For example, on a national level, financial instruments have been mobilized funding for the regions and have structurally implemented shrinking measures into the Municipal Fund. This way, shrinking municipalities are eligible for more funding (PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, 2010).

## *INSPIRATIONS FROM EXPERIMENTAL (NEW) APPROACHES*

"Shrinkage. Experiment and inspire" is a document published in 2010 by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. Just one year after the "Action plan Shrinking with Quality" came out, the vision document reports about local and regional developments of the shrinking regions in the Netherlands. Titled "Experiment and inspire", the document reflects on how governments on different levels, have agreed to and conducted experiments to find new approaches, experimental endeavors and initiatives, and "to identify bottlenecks in existing regulations" (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2010, p. 5). It clearly defines that actions in the shrinking regions should have the

overarching goal of maintaining quality of life but should be tailored to the specific local context and not transferred as blueprints to other shrinking areas.

Citizen participation and active involvement in accommodating shrinkage is noted as priority, even and especially when deciding upon hard measures, such as housing demolitions. Examples from the shrinking region of East Groningen depict what effects this approach can have. Namely, a well-accepted development and joint shaping of the area's future, strengthened place attachment and sense of community. Citizens were involved in creating a vision for certain neighborhoods that needed restructuring due to oversupply of housing infrastructure. They were given the option of demolishing certain buildings, or not. Putting the social dimension of shrinkage to the forefront this approach has gained recognition amongst residents. It is in line with research on social capital in shrinking cities, such as Le Borgne (2023) on an individual level, or Ročak et al. (2016b), Ročak (2019; Meijer and Syssner)Meijer and Syssner (2017) on the level of collective social capital, who all highlight its importance for urban redevelopment and planning processes.

Yet, in this particular example, giving citizens the option to demolish buildings or not is ethically questionable. As stated in chapter 1.2 LOCAL MANIFESTATIONS OF SHRINKAGE, I argue that such an approach can accelerate socio-spatial inequalities and by transferring public obligations to citizens and foster austerity policies. Research on self-provisioning by Kinder (2014) further underlines ethical issues that can be triggered when citizens cannot rely on public authorities, municipal services or intermediaries.

A different experiment took place in Heerlen, where the issue of vacant housing and the condition of houses needed to be addressed. Housing exchange and individual solutions emerged as strategies after educating citizens on financial aspects and overall shrinkage associated challenges on the housing market. Alternative accommodation was found for residents in close cooperation with housing associations and therefore, demolition strategies could take place. This experiment led to a learning curve regarding policies and regulations. It was then realized that most of the laws and regulations are not aligned with shrinkage and associated issues, but rather cater towards growth (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2010, p. 12).

## *A MAGIC FORMULA: THE CHANGING ROLE OF CITIZENS*

With the year 2011 a pivotal change in Dutch governance emerged: active citizenship. As the document Council for Social Development (2011, p. 12), which to a large extent focuses on welfare institutions and the health sector, but also governance mechanisms in general, states: "There are

plenty of cuts to be made, the government has to step back, and with that the stories about an (even) greater role for citizens come naturally." Attention is drawn to the changing role of citizens and their expanding responsibilities. The authors even call it "the magic formulas to overcome the financial-economic crisis" (ibid.). This is problematic on many levels: lacking financial resources, time, capacity to get involved. However, this statement is very followed by addressing existing issues of power: "This is less an appeal to citizens to do it themselves than an appeal to the institutional field to make space, show courage, let go of power and establish new connections with (groups of) citizens" (Council for Social Development, 2011, p. 13).

With that, an important challenge of governance changes is addressed, namely the rigidity of administrative work flows and holding onto established routines that don't allow for much flexibility. In line with Hospers (2014) and (Neu, 2011), citizen engagement seems to be understood as a stopgap for the shrinking services of the government in this context. Scholars Wilde et al. (2014), amongst others voice critical opinions of such arrangements that point to very little opportunities and perspectives for citizens, whose goal is to trigger change in (local) governance. On the other hand, Hendrik Wagenaar et al. (2015) highlight the transformative potential of civic initiatives, and in line with this, the findings of Mattijssen et al. (2019, p. 14) clearly state that under "certain circumstances, citizens can realize significant transformations in governance". Most importantly, such circumstances include a shared imaginary of the future.

The document Burgerkracht further describes the outlook for civic involvement, the barriers and factors that could trigger involvement, or scale up existing initiatives: "At most, they need an occasional bit of money and a bit of support (…)" (Council for Social Development, 2011, p. 41).

## *TRUST IN CITIZENS: A NEW ERA*

"Loslaten in vertrouwen" – "Letting go in confidence", published by the Council for Public Administration marks a pivotal change in the administrative work and governance mechanisms in the Netherlands. The foreword states: "Change hangs in the air. Our view of the division of roles between citizen and government is changing." (Council for Public Administration, 2012, p. 3); and with that a great statement towards rearranging and reassessing the roles of citizens and government(s) was made. A big step towards this, was the processes of the so-called "socialization" during which the Dutch government took steps towards a more compact and effective way of working on the one hand, and reduce its size. By doing this, the authors argue, "It is about a less 'greedy' government that leaves room for social initiative." (ibid.) The first argument here is that the Netherlands already have a very

active society that is being hindered in their initiatives by governmental structures. Through the process of socialization, changes were made towards a role of the government as partner for these initiatives. The government's role was adapted in order to accelerate such initiatives rather than regulating them potentially too much. The second argument for "socialization" of the Dutch Government is financial resource-oriented. With less administrative staff and a delegation of tasks, come less expenditures and less policy making (Council for Public Administration, 2012, p. 14).

The withdrawal of the government from some tasks, or, the change of the government's role in some tasks, is not only a result of the lack of financial resources or the deliberative transfer of public tasks to citizens as a result of austerity politics. The authors argue that this transformation stems from the realization that the government cannot solve many of today's challenges because they are too complicated or complex. In short, "(…) the government cannot do it alone in the end." (Council for Public Administration, 2012, p. 10) and relies to a great extent on the knowledge, experience, and expertise from the society.

With a reallocation of tasks, not only were governmental tasks reduced, but society's role was upscaled with regard to involvement and responsibility. That meant that society was transferred ownership of challenges and the potential solutions. Drawing upon the work of Lowndes and Wilson (2001) on the dependencies between social capital and local governance, the adaptation of governmental structures ("socialization") in the Netherlands raise the importance of institutional design and mobilization of social capital. They conclude that institutional design of local governance can affect civic initiatives and the emergence of new interest groups (Lowndes and Wilson, 2001). They argue further, that path dependence can be an influential factor that prohibits implementation of changes to the institutional design. The socialization process in the Netherlands therefore can be regarded as a timely and necessary step to accommodate the development of an active society. As is stated in "Loslaten in vertrouwen" (Council for Public Administration, 2012) on several occasions, the vital society already exists in the Netherlands. The adaptation of governance therefore can be regarded as a reaction to a transformation that was already brewing.

## *LADDER OF PARTICIPATION REVISITED*

Talking about citizen participation and changes in local governance gains value through tangible outputs. The Council for Public Administration is a formal institution and advocated in 2012 for a change in governance. This change was proposed as joint governance with citizens and reportedly had influence in the development of Dutch governance practice (Ubels et al., 2019a). The Council introduced a paradigm shift and with that came the development of a government participation ladder. While the very well-known participation ladder by Arnstein (1969) defines stages of citizen participation in public processes and projects, the Dutch government participation ladder was turned upside down. By introducing the revised participation ladder, the Dutch government declares that it is letting go of tasks where citizens are perfectly able to proceed by themselves and does not interfere. This marks the first step in ladder, called "loslaten" (letting go). The next step, "faciliteren" underlines the role of the government as facilitator for citizen initiatives. One step above on the government ladder of participation, "stimulate" is located. This is where initiatives are located, that the government would like to see being realized, but leaves this part to society. "Regisseren", meaning "directing" or

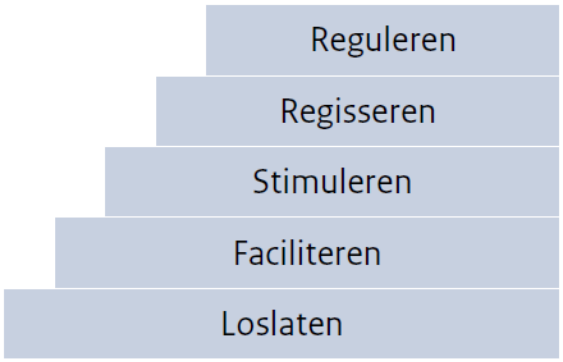


Figure 15. The government participation ladder. Council of Public Administration, 2012 (p.76).

"steering", is the next step on the ladder and summarizes projects that are led by the government, but involve and invite society too. Lastly, "reguleren" stands for "regulating" and marks the most invasive instrument on the ladder, and refers to law, regulation and safety.

The ladder of government participation by the Dutch Council of Public Administration marks a pivotal transformation of public governance. However, this does not mean that governments in the Netherlands let go entirely of their traditional role as "regulators". Regulation still remains an instrument, but with the new ladder of participation, many more instruments can be accessed depending on the situation, actor constellation and project theme. Complementing this development,

a new or adjusted profile of civil servants was announced. Civil servants have to be skilled in communication, in order to meet the requirements that the new roles in "letting go", "facilitating" or "stimulating" bring with them: "(…) previously they were able to concentrate mainly on knowledge acquisition on substantive files and the colleagues in the communication department took care of contact with the outside world (…)" (Council for Public Administration, 2012, p. 74).

The ladder of government participation has been addressed by scholars and used as a heuristic tool to study the role and the change of the role of governments. Mees et al. (2019) for example conclude from their study that governments are slowly stepping down from their regulating role to the other positions, such as facilitating or stimulating. Further, they highlight that government's role within a project or citizen initiative tends to be fluid and not static, and can change over time and duration of one initiative.

## *DOING DEMOCRACY*

"Do Democracy" is a government paper that builds on previous publications such as "Letting go in confidence" by the Council for Public Administration, and takes the matter to an official level. It is described as a memorandum, which marks the first steps of many of the new agenda towards a co-governance with citizens and more "DIY Democracy" (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2013, p. 3). The term "Do Democracy" is based on the recommendations by various councils that put forward the request for action of the Dutch government to adapt to the changes that were already happening in society. "Do Democracy" implies that this transformation also has implications for democracy, namely adding the "domain of collective decision-making" (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2010, p. 12). Therefore, "Do Democracy" is set out as a large-scale transformation and not just following a trend. The undertaking is presented as a joint task of many actors, such as various Ministries and social partners, amongst which associations such as VNG, the local government association of the Netherlands, Platform31, an actor who functions as intermediary in order to connect policy, practice and science and many others. "Do Democracy" is a document of action, in which the Cabinet states how they can take steps to better enable, accelerate and support social initiatives.

In line with "Letting go in confidence", the document emphasizes the new fluid role of the government but takes it even further: "The government has a role in this process (although that role is not unambiguous or always clear)." (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2010, p. 9) By this statement, the Cabinet not only underlines the ambitious goal of introducing more flexibility, but

explains that its involvement will align with the individual project and its contribution might look different in each case.

The authors importantly summarize the three main reasons, that are argued to be the reasons for a change in governance: first, an increased empowerment of citizens and citizens who want to be more involved and have the capacity to do so. This questions the current division of roles between government and society. Second, budgetary issues of the government which lead to it being not able to provide the services it used to. Subsequently, the division of labor between government and society has to be revisited. Third, the increasing fragmentation of society can be a result of a lack of trust between citizens, and between citizens and the government. Following, a more collective and co-operative relationship between the two actors should be pursued. These three reasons lay the ground for the transformation of governance, as explained by the Cabinet.

It has been argued by various scholars that such developments increase a "responsibilization" of citizens, meaning the assignment of tasks, burdens and risks to them (Pill, 2022; Klein et al., 2017) and as further stressed by Sullivan et al. (2013) or Featherstone et al. (2012), the promotion of active citizenship and do-it-yourself society type of values facilitates self-provisioning of former public services. The document "Do Democracy" highlights countless times the strongly organized civil society, repeats the high share of volunteers and civil society organizations and emphasizes the underlying collective interests of society that lay the ground for such a transformation. It can be argued that it is a strategic process to further strengthen and accelerate the intrinsic motivation of citizens to get active.

One of the ways towards reaching the set goal of a more cooperative and collaborative relationship has been the set-up of strategic channels to identify innovative business and social initiatives and connect (with) them. Therefore, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations together with several municipalities and other institutions as well as entrepreneurs and social actors have joint forces under the name "Force in the Netherlands" ("Kracht in Nederland, KiNL). This association has developed a monitoring database of innovative initiatives, worked with media strategically to increase the visibility of the innovative capacity, contributed to fostering the connection between initiatives but also funding agencies (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2013). Further, a Platform has been set up to improve access to funding for social entrepreneurs. Another initiative by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations has been the collaboration with Platform31 and Movise, two platforms for neighborhood development and citizen participation on the development of a space to connect researchers from universities and research

institutions and municipalities to bridge the gap in knowledge and practice with regard to active citizenship.

Summarizing, a clear picture of the Cabinet's vision and engagement in accelerating the transformation towards changing and improving the participation culture in the Netherlands is visible. Many strategic programs have been put in place to get to achieving this goal as well as smaller and incremental steps have been implemented. Although the document "Do Democracy" very heavily emphasizes the already existing strong society and praises the participation and volunteering efforts, it cannot be overlooked, that efforts are made on the Cabinet's side to change their internal ways of working and adapting to the ongoing trends. More so, the goal has been made clear that the transformation is about long lasting and sustainable changes in the governance of the country and within municipalities.

### *NEEDED: URBANITY!*

The author of "Real World Laboratory: The degrowing city" is Neimed, a socio-economic knowledge institute that is located in Heerlen. It specializes in research on shrinkage and is part of a bigger network together with the Open University, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences and Maastricht University. This way, a multidisciplinary team of researchers and students teach and learn about the effects of shrinkage and develop pathways towards a resilient region that experiences demographic transition (Neimed, n.d.). In this publication, shrinkage is often referred to as "urban transformation" and particularly Heerlen is considered a "Reallabor", a real-world laboratory, or living lab. The document shifts the perception of the shrinking city highlighting that a shrinking city is not the opposite of a growing city, but has its own dynamics and specificities.

The authors refer specifically to Heerlen and the historical factors that have transformed the area. While talking about urbanity and discussing the urban character of a shrinking city, they point to the city of Heerlen, once a vibrant and rich center of the mining industry that through demolition of surplus built infrastructure has experienced a rise in open green spaces. As a strategy, this development has produced a different dynamic and subsequently led to what the authors call "village-ification" and "rural-isation" (Neimed, n.d., p. 26). In turn, the city's urbanity, which for a long time was Heerlen's identity, started to disappear: "In the process, Heerlen is being turned into a place for hikers, and not for the original residents of a city, the middle class and the entrepreneur. But the fact is that shrinking cities are still cities, and in this capacity, even though they are shrinking, they need urbanity!" (Neimed, n.d., p. 27)

However, the circumstances of shrinkage offered new potentials, too. Conceptualizing Heerlen as a living laboratory to experiment with new approaches and thinking about different futures with regard to the market, the government and civil society. Stepping away from problem-centered thinking (such as discussing about the closure of another school) unlocked the designing of structural changes (such as how to structure a new educational system).

Table 2. Overview of documents used for document analysis in the case Heerlen.

| **Overview: Analyzed documents for the case of Heerlen, the Netherlands** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Document Name** | **Year** | **Author** |
| Evaluatierapport Operatie Hartslag ("Evaluation Report Operation Heartbeat") | 2009 | Municipality of Heerlen, Police Academy of the Netherlands |
| Actieplan Krimpen met Kwaliteit ("Action plan Shrinking with Quality") | 2009 | Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment |
| Naar een duurzaam vitale regio. Regionaal Actieplan Bevolklingsdaling Parkstad Limburg („Towards a sustainably vital region. Regional Action Plan Population decline Parkstad Limburg") | 2010 | EGTS Cityregion Aachen |
| Van bestrijden naar begeleiden. Demografische krimp in Nederland ("From combat to guidance: demographic decline in the Netherlands") | 2010 | PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency |
| Krimp. Experimenteren en inspireren. ("Shrinkage. Experiment and inspire") | 2010 | Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations |
| Burgerkracht. De toekomst van het social werk in Nederland ("Civic power. The future of social work in the Netherlands.") | 2011 | Council for Social Development |
| Loslaten in vertrouwen ("Letting go in confidence. Towards a new relationship between government, market and society") | 2012 | Council for Public Administration (ROB) |
| Doe democratie ("Do Democracy") | 2013 | Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations |
| Realllabor: de ont-groeiende stad ("Real World Laboratory: The Degrowing City") | 2016 | Neimed (independent socio-economic knowledge institute) |
| Rapport Indicatieve MKBA Gebrookerbos ("Project report Gebrookerbos") | 2020 | Neimed (independent socio-economic knowledge institute) |
| Rapport Methodische beschrijving Gebrookerbos ("Methodological description of Gebrookerbos") | 2020 | Neimed (independent socio-economic knowledge institute) |

# 10.4 GEBROOKERBOS: REVITALIZATION 2.0

The questions of revitalizing and transforming Heerlen have been ongoing since the beginning of the century, as the analysis in chapter 10.3REVITALIZATION EFFORTS presented. One of the larger projects was Gebrookerbos, introduced in 2016 by the municipality. It is a self-proclaimed bottom-up area development method where citizens play the leading role in transforming empty areas. Gebrookerbos is the central area of interest in this thesis. The title “Gebrookerbos” refers to the green space and forest that is surrounding Heerlen (“bos”) and the facilitating actions of a “broker” (“brooker”). Based on interviews with citizens, the project manager and various account managers, as well as a research team member, who accompanied this project, the following results present a timeline of how Gebrookerbos was initiated and an actor-network of involved actors. Findings around the history of Heerlen are included as well, as they provide a differentiated understanding of individual experiences. The results represent step II and III of the analytical framework presented in Figure 3 (p.34), and are connected to the key elements discussed in the theory chapter PART C: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS.

## *GEBROOKERBOS METHOD: REAPING GREEN GOLD*

Gebrookerbos is labelled as a “bottom-up transformation method” that targets vacant areas mainly in the North of Heerlen by projects led by citizens and entrepreneurs. It was designed to step back from traditional and utopian “masterplanning” and move towards developing strategic designs and uses with citizens (Project Manager, 2021). Gebrookerbos aims at a change in the consciousness of citizens, and creating new impulses to imagine vacant spaces in a different

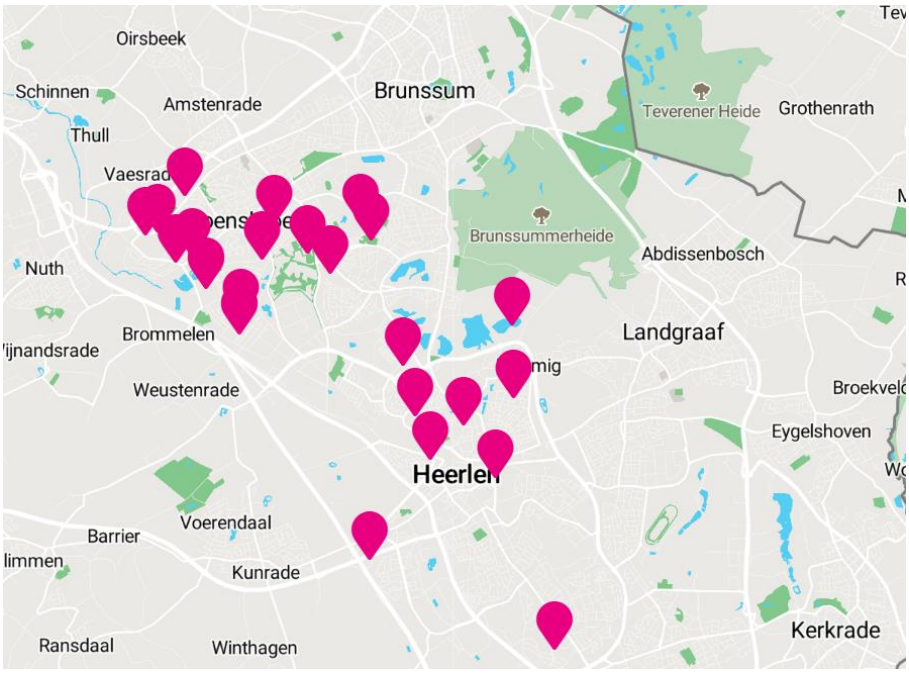


Figure 16. Localization of Gebrookerbos initiatives.
Source: welkomingebrookerbos.nl

way. The Gebrookerbos method is based on giving citizens and entrepreneurs support in realizing their ideas and develop them as micro-initiatives. Place-attachment to Heerlen and the daily confrontation with empty and underused spaces is seen as motivation that can drive citizens to participate in the Gebrookerbos project. A multitude of such micro-initiatives works together to revive and regenerate the large underused area of Heerlen North. The overall goal was to increase the quality of life predominantly in the socio-cultural and socio-economic sphere (Neimed, 2020b). The Gebrookerbos project report says:

*"Tackling the places that now look 'lost' could give a big boost to the quality and vitality of the region and the surrounding neighborhoods in particular. Because, where wealth used to be extracted from black gold, today green gold can be reaped." (Damoiseaux and Reinders, 2019, p. 1)*

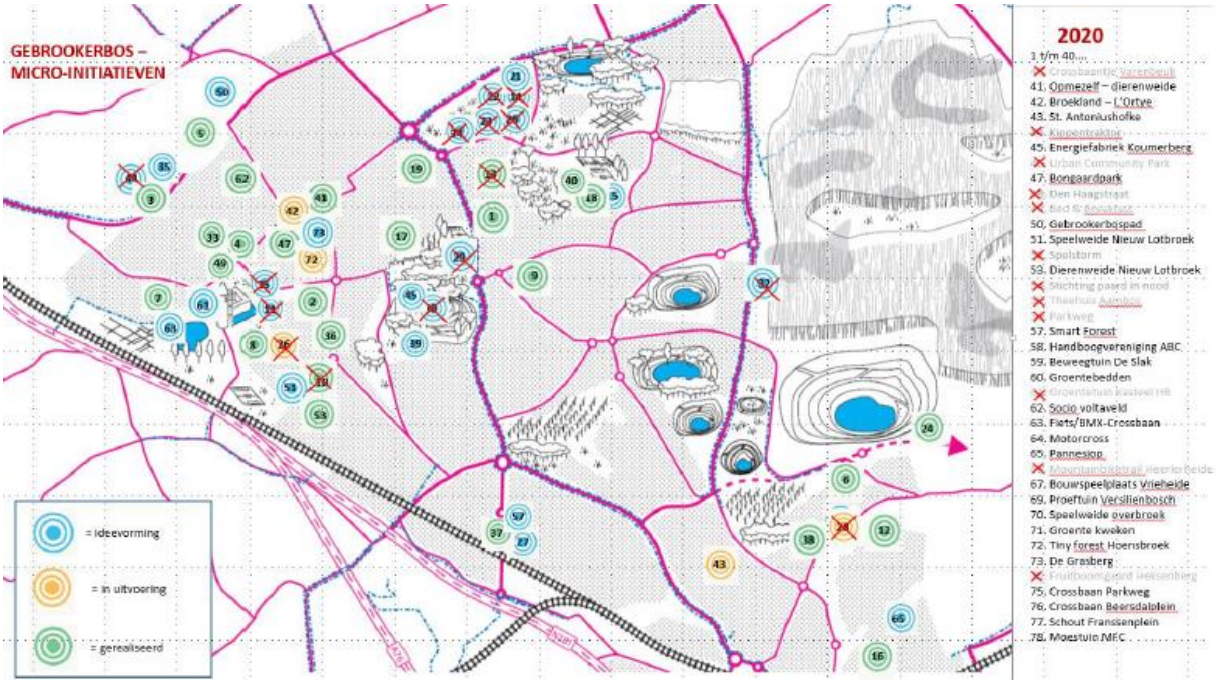


Figure 17. Overview of micro-initiatives in different stages. Source: Gebrookerbos leaflet.

Thus, the municipality as project initiator has defined three key themes, under which such micro-citizen-initiatives should be framed: nature, network, and urban farming. Nature-based projects should focus on giving the space back to nature by implementing tiny forests or parks. Network-related initiatives should concentrate on tourism or recreation and serve the purpose of connecting society. Examples are bed&breakfasts, community parks or dog schools. Lastly, urban farming-based projects are supposed to focus on knowledge transfer and education and give attention to sustainability. Such

micro-initiatives could result in urban farms or vegetable gardens (Project Manager, 2021). Therefore, Gebrookerbos has to be seen as a network of civic initiatives.

In 2020, the number of micro-initiatives was 78. From those, 32 have been realized by that time, or were in the process, 36 of the initiatives have not been continued, and 10 projects were in the first stage of the process (see Figure 17).

Gebrookerbos is a project that was developed by the municipality of Heerlen and funded by the Province of Limburg, IBA Parkstadt and Interreg Meuse-Rhine Euroregion. Additional involved partners include Neimed, the independent socio-economic knowledge institute and Open Universiteit. The cooperation between Neimed, Open Universiteit and the municipality had three strategic goals in the Gebrookerbos project: provide engagement marketing, implement the transformation process and research and monitoring throughout the process. Within these goals, engagement marketing is highlighted by the project manager[4]. Inspiring each other, finding and creating networks and learning from each other is key to Gebrookerbos. On the one hand, this is crucial for citizens to profit from each other and the experiences in the initiatives. On the other hand, engagement marketing serves the purpose of minimizing the distance between citizens and the government and therefore building and strengthening trust between those actors.

[4] The case of Gebrookerbos in Heerlen, the Netherlands was subject to a project seminar for Bachelor students at then TU Kaiserslautern in May 2021. The project manager of Gebrookerbos, Kelly Damoiseaux as well as a researcher from Neimed, Maja Rocak were invited for presentations and discussions around Gebrookerbos. Some content of these presentations, which have been kindly provided by the presenters, are used as information material for this thesis.

## *"OPEN SPACES" AND "REST AREAS": OPPORTUNITY VS. PROBLEM*

With the shutdown of the mining industry in the 1970s, Heerlen's shrinking process commenced due to a multitude of factors. Relying heavily on this one industry, which once was the reason for the city's wealth and drawing people to the region, an important part of the city's identity fell apart. The area around the North of Heerlen "Heerlen Noord" was once the center of the mines and with the closures, this part of town was affected in a particular way. Not only did the end of the mining industry trigger a lot of unemployment, due to not providing enough substitute jobs that were fitting for the mining workers, but a large percentage of workers were left with health problems as well.

> *"If we add the two numbers- people who were receiving social support from the municipality – this was around 50%. […] And this was very problematic. For the individual people, but also for their children. There was a whole generation that grew up with their father being unemployed and their grandfather not being able to work either." (Brooker, 2020)*

Hence, many generations were affected by the closure of the industry, ultimately leading to selective outmigration due to no perspectives in the city, leaving the older generations behind. With tearing down the old mining infrastructure, and the population loss due to outmigration, rightsizing policies were implemented to adjust the built infrastructure to the current population size.

> *"[…] there we saw a lot of schools that were closed and brought together I none so most of the time they left one place so it was torn down and there was nothing left. Also for sport clubs; because of the shrinkage of the population also they needed to go together in one and leaving an empty place behind […]." (Project Manager, 2020)*

Figure 18. Open Areas that emerged after rightsizing policies. Source: Jos Reinders

Figure 19. Open Areas that emerged after rightsizing policies. Source: Jos Reinders.

However, the population loss and the challenges that came with it, is not only being seen as a problem. Rather, the municipality tries to highlight the opportunities that can come with the plethora of spaces that were left behind.

> *"[…] shrinkage is for citizen participation a positive thing. Because we have a lot of space. And a lot of space where people can do things. It's something which they are confronted with every day, so that's when they ask for the municipality 'Hey, we see these empty spaces, we have lots of ideas for that, can we do something about it?'" (Project Manager, 2020)*

Similarly, the topic of identity is being approached in a rather positive way. Although it is clear, that Heerlen has lost an important part of its identity when the mines were closed, the current shrinkage is seen as an opportunity to discover and reveal other identities of the city.

## *PATH DEPENDENCY OF PARTICIPIATION IN HEERLEN*

Since 2011, the municipality of Heerlen was confronted with potential initiatives that were brought to them by the citizens themselves. However, participation and active citizenship was not always prominent in this area of the Netherlands. Power relations in the mining industry are being held accountable for the lack of participation until now.

> *"Because, working in the mines, there was the Big Boss and the mayor of the city and the head of Church, they had something to say. And the workers needed to keep their mouths shut and work. If they were critical, they would not only lose their job, but also their home. […] So the consequences were that people never stood up for their needs*

*and concerns and were very passive when everything happened. And now, in the recent years, I think this is changing" (Brooker, 2020)*

Additionally, the famous King's Speech of 2013, where the end of the welfare state was declared and citizens were called to participate in provision of everyday services and shaping their neighborhoods, triggered the "participation society" in a specific way.

*"Of course, 2013 […] on the commercials in TV there was always 'The society – this is you!' and it was always said that the people need to take responsibility for their own future. […] This has stimulated the awareness slowly." (Brooker, 2020)*

## *CIVIC INITIATIVES: PLACE ATTACHMENT AS CONTRIBUTING FACTOR*

While in theory, older generations are not regarded as critical mass to come up with new and creative ideas, in a shrinking city that is shaped by outmigration of the young and educated, creative ideas never came up short. And still, the remaining younger population is interested in civic initiatives as well.

*"That was very different. The very first project […] these were older people. Proper mining workers. [..] In this park, there's younger ones, like 30,35. And the one with the dogs, they are in the middle, like 50,52,53. All different layers of population. […] From 10,12 to 80,85 years, that is a big range." (Account Manager, 2021)*

However, there is a tendency in who actually starts the initiatives, who comes up with the first idea. Most of the time it's in fact older people who start the projects:

*"[…] they are the ones who start the initiative. But we always say, you need to have a bigger layer of people who are connected, because otherwise it doesn't work, and especially the younger people. You see that there's always one citizen who is getting everything together, but around him there's a mix of all kinds of people." (Project Manager, 2020)*

Ellen, one of the initiators of an inner-city citizen project, lived across a building that was vacant for several years. She was born and raised in Heerlen and experienced the years of the "heroin pandemic" as a teenager and therefore feels attached to the place. She talks about the demolition process of the building across her apartment and the stand-still that shaped the space afterwards. Being confronted with the view of an empty square, she was inspired and motivated to come together with other people and formulate a vision for this space:

*"And then we started with the group of people and we said we can make a year, we can make a nice place of it in the middle of the city. I can look from my apartment, I can look at that place and this is very nice place. […] And after we started with 30 people and […] it's a little bit lower because we don't meet each other. But the garden that's always open is full of people. […] Maybe it's the best place in Heerlen at this moment. Most of us, they tried to do it. Make it a little bit greener." (Ellen, 2021)*

Miriam, who is over 50 years old, has a similar history. She grew up in Hoensbroek, located in the North of Heerlen, which became a part of Heerlen in 1982. Miriam was part of the team who initiated the project Bongaardpark. She as well is talking about strong place attachment to Heerlen:

*"I worked 9 years in another city but when the opportunity came I rushed back to my roots and a lot of people I know do the same. […] the people here make the best of everything and now the change is becoming visible. More green more culture more urban experiences, more people that are proud of their history. […] " (Miriam, 2021)*

Together with her neighbors, Miriam was part of a group that developed ideas and concrete plans to revive a vacant space. With the help of many actors, their idea came to realization:

*"We came together with our neighbors to talk about options what to do when de building was gone. I signed up for the group that worked out the plans and together we made sure it got realized. […] The idea was an idea that came out of a brainstorm session with all our neighbors, we had about 40 concrete ideas. Our workgroup made the plan. […] We had help from different stakeholders: the owner of the ground (woonpunt), the neighborhood council (SBMG), the professionals from our city (architect) and of cource the neighbors. We got money from a bank (Rabobank), Heerlen (they paid for the trees), Gebrookerbos, Kern met pit, groene kruis, IBA and donations from local compagnies. (Miriam, 2021)*

Figure 20. Bongaardpark initiative. Source: Jos Reinders.

Leo, who is over 60 and involved in the initiative De Dobbeltuin explains:

*"So the plan the first plan was to run the garden for the neighborhood, but that don't work out in the in the start, we had two people from the neighborhood and I also live in the neighborhood. […] We want also to have a social meeting place that people can meet each other. Now it starts after seven years. It starts to become a thing like that. But from the start, when we made the garden were also children in the neighborhood have a playing field. And they came to play in the garden when I was up there." (Leo, 2021)*

Figure 21. De Dobbeltuin initiative. Source: Jos Reinders.

Similarly to the Bongaardpark initiative, they received help from others by starting a crowdfunding initiative to fund the first trees for their space. The Dobbeltuin project started with no financial resources, and did not want to spend large amounts of personal finances on it, either. Through an advertisement in the local newspaper with the call to help financing five fruit trees, they collected the money within two months.

## *LACK OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES AS TRIGGER FOR CIVIC INVOLVEMENT*

With more and more buildings being torn down and open green spaces emerging, the municipality realized that the whole area around Heerlen Noord needed to be restructured to effectively deal with the situation. Area restructuring typically falls under planning and is a top-down act.

*"But now they said, we don't have the money for this." (Brooker, 2020: 40)*

One of the initial thoughts for restructuring was to experiment with a different type of municipality work. Since it was very clear from the beginning, that the municipality would not be able to provide a new area plan that would accommodate the situation, civic participation came to mind quickly. Two planning offices were hired, one from Rotterdam and one from Berlin to brainstorm how the restructuring could work with the involvement of citizens. Here, the "Atlas Gebrookerbos" was developed in 2012, where it was clearly stated that citizens would play an important role in the restructuring program. (Brooker, 2020) Hence, involving citizens did come from a necessity on the hand.

## *"ATLAS GEBROOKERBOS" PAVING THE WAY FOR EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE*

It is important to underline, that with the "Atlas Gebrookerbos" the strategy for area restructuring was developed by the municipality, Neimed and the Open University. The idea did come from the top, however,

> *"[…] we knew there were people with ideas, so we thought let's start with them. And see how we can facilitate as a municipality how to realize their ideas and from those, I think we had three or four ideas, and from then on we grew further and further." (Project Manager, 2020) Defining the strategy was a monumental point in the whole process. "We let go of the masterplan, you actually say 'citizens, it's up to you'" (Project Manager, 2020).*

Leo explains the marketing of Gebrookerbos and how the municipality actively approached citizens to name their initiatives and start getting involved. He talks about the very organized and structured process that was implemented to facilitate bottom-up involvement. Although, still the majority of work is voluntary and requires a lot of energy, even if the administrative process is taken care of:

*"They asked people if you have an idea. Come to us if you want to do it! Invite more people to make a plan. And I think in Heerlen it's already very good organized that people can do what they want. But yeah, it's just always hard to do such a project. Of course, a lot of effort, of course a lot of energy. […] and it's not for everybody to do it." (Leo, 2021)*

Some key features of Gebrookerbos have been defined early on. They represent underlying values of involved stakeholders and define the innovative approach. Ownership is such a core value and addresses the citizens and the municipality. The residents take over ownership of their initiative and therefore full responsibility. On the other hand, the municipality has to give up and transfer the ownership to the residents. It is a task that goes both ways and as a core value, it can only be fulfilled if both parties contribute. Another key element is knowledge sharing. A Gebrookerbos Academy was introduced with the aim to create a long-term knowledge sharing platform where citizens could exchange ideas or update each other on their process. But the Gebrookerbos Academy was more than a platform for exchange, it became a place of sharing the understanding of each other's roles in Gebrookerbos and discussion about how those roles and expectations could be fulfilled. Additionally, a plethora of joint activities for citizens and municipal officials was established in order to constantly work on and shape the relationship and build trust. Another key element is to work towards a network society and network governance. This goes hand in hand with reducing the distance between citizens and the government. This requires a change from municipality and the traditional hierarchical system to a new definition of "the government". Other core elements address the implementation of intermediaries, such as the brooker and the account managers, engagement marketing, and a sustainable funding scheme for the micro-initiatives.

From setting up a Gebrookerbos Funds, to installing new positions in the municipality "Account managers" and one independent position "Brooker" the way of working had to change drastically within the municipality, however remained rather formal than informal:

*"It's at formal level, so most of the time they do something on the ground that is owned by the municipality. So we need to make rules – not rules – but some things that you agree with each other. Who is going to do the maintenance […] and put that on a paper. […] This is what the municipality does, this is what you do as the citizens. And then we sign it." (Project Manager, 2020)*

This collaboration and experimenting with working with citizens had one important underlining element that was a necessity from both sides: trust. The monitoring researcher highlights:

*"Okay, is there trust that inhabitants would give new function (to these areas) and that the Gemeente is not so restricting […]. There are also some critical points when it comes to okay, give them space, experiment, and don't be so strict on regulations – this is still something difficult […] (Monitoring researcher, 2020).*

## *SHORTENING THE DISTANCE BETWEEN MUNICIPALITY AND CITIZENS: BROOKER AND ACCOUNT-MANAGER*

Bureaucracy and long distances within the municipality are a common challenge when it comes to civic initiatives. Many citizens do not even get started with trying to realize their ideas, because they know that there will be at least several people that they will be referred to, several forms they would need to fill out and sometimes even years of preparation and collecting all necessary documents. The issue of a growing distance and distrust between government and citizens was very well known and openly discussed in Heerlen. Particularly, bureaucratic and long processes were named as challenges and barriers that prohibit citizens to reach out to the municipality. In 2014, with the goal of decreasing the distance between government and citizens, the municipality approached Neimed and Open Universiteit and started working on the idea of the Gebrookerbos method (Neimed, 2020b). A bottom-up approach that redefines the relationship between citizens, government and market was expressed as the core value of the Gebrookerbos method. For this purpose, two roles have been installed: the brooker-role and the account manager-role. The latter is described by the project manager as follows: "Every citizen's initiative in the Gebrookerbos network is linked to a permanent contact officer at the municipality. This was a new role in which the civil servant facilitates the citizen's initiative in everything that needs to be done at the municipal level. This includes permits, contracts, designing the public space, maintenance agreements, municipal connections etc." (Project Manager, 2021).

This role of account managers was implemented and each civic initiative was assigned only one account manager, who would guide them through the whole process. They would be the only contact point in the municipality that the citizens needed:

> *"[…] when it comes to building processes in the municipality, has definitely made more accessible for citizens to conduct an initiative, absolutely." (Monitoring Researcher, 2020)*

However, it was not a smooth process to implement this new way of working in the municipality. Not all colleagues in the municipality where agreeing to bending rules for citizens. At this point, the role of the account managers came was crucial:

> *" […] these account managers would say: 'I know that these are the rules, but what are the other options?'" (Monitoring researcher, 2020)*

The role of account managers differs to a large extent from "regular" civil servants in the municipality. Particularly, understanding the mentality change, and that experimental governance

might provide something good in return for the municipality and for the citizens, was difficult to explain to long-established civil servants:

> *"I was like.. stop talking, and start doing, the citizens need something to be done, not us. […] It is difficult to change the thinking of the people – my own colleagues!" (Account manager, 2021)*

Apart from giving new life to "rest areas" that remained after right sizing policies were implemented, the Gebrookerbos method had an important goal of shifting responsibilities within the city to show citizens that their ideas matter and joint collaboration can lead to great outcomes. Citizens would come up with their ideas on their own, although sometimes there was a little help needed from the "brooker" to really get them going.

> *"They could have their own ideas about it but also realize it so it could be something of their own and it could mean something for the neighborhood […]." (Project Manager, 2020)*

Particularly in times of long-term shrinkage, loss of identity and population loss, the municipality realized that working on their own would not be possible on the scale that empty spaces were emerging in the city. It was a two-way street: letting go from the municipality's side, and stepping up from the citizen's side.

## *THE ROLE OF THE "BROOKER" AND SCEPTICISM TOWARDS THE MUNICIPALITY*

The role of the "brooker" needs to be highlighted as a crucial step in the process. More importantly, how this role was approached says a lot about the openness of the municipality towards experimental governance:

> *"They asked me to do this project as brooker for Gebrookerbos. I didn't know what this was..[..] The interesting thing was that they couldn't define very well what my role would be. I needed to discover this within the process, on my own." (Brooker, 2020)*

Although not many details about this role were clear in the beginning, it was understood that it was a different role than the one of the account managers. The brooker was there for the process of initiation of the initiatives, a "pacemaker" (Account Manager, 2021) who would also help people to put their ideas on paper and to encourage them to go to the municipality.

The brooker needed to be an independent person, not affiliated with the municipality, but also not with the social work profession for example, who is dependent on the municipality. So, the position of the brooker as an independently working actor, who was employed bei Neimed, was crucial to get in touch with citizens.

> *"They asked me in this one project […] 'and you are working for the municipality?' – 'No, I don't' – 'okay, then, what can you do for us?'" (Brooker, 2020)*

This simultaneously illustrates the skepticism from citizens towards the municipality. The brooker needed to be able to gain trust and letting people know that they could contact him very informally if they needed some assistance with their initiative, or if they needed some help with the municipality.

Leo from the initiative De Dobbeltuin explains how the administrative requirements from the municipality hindered him and his colleagues to develop their project:

> *"Yeah, I go to ask for permission to build a pizza oven. So then I had to give them drawings, technical drawings and yes. And the daughter of a volunteer has learned the technical drawings and she made that but I had also give them pictures of the situation and it was not enough. We had to pay [xx amount of money, audio not traceable] because we had asked for the permission, but we didn't get permission." (Leo, 2021)*

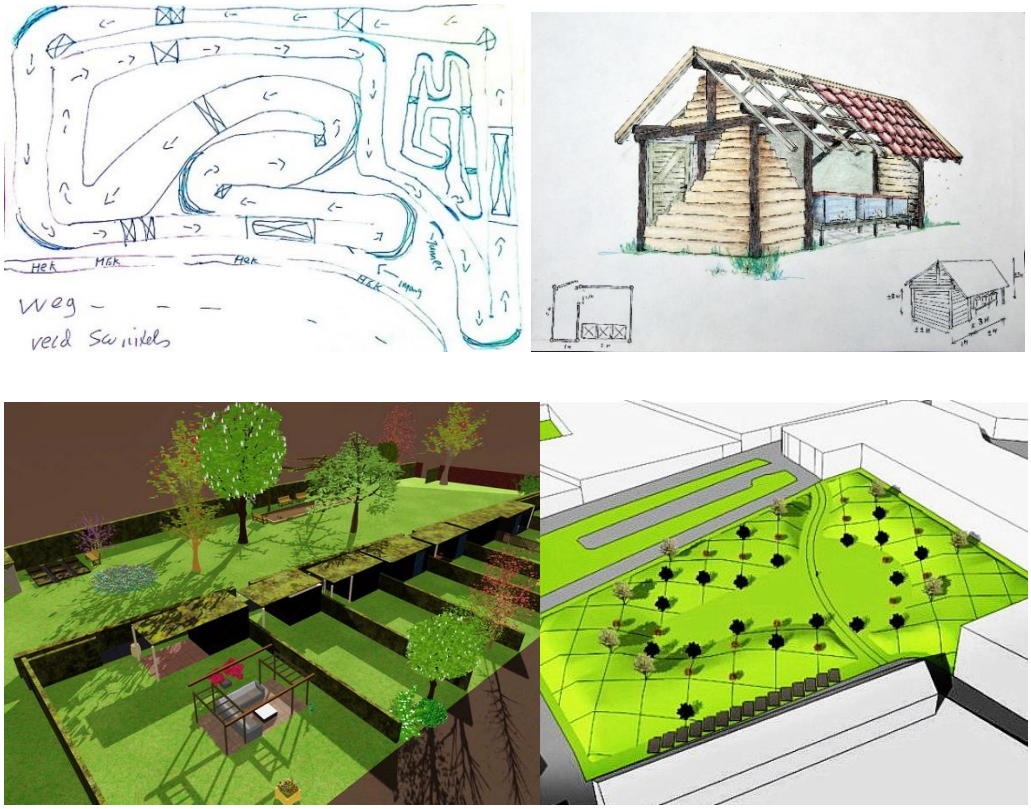

Figure 22. Examples of drawings of various initiatives. Source: Jos Reinders.

## *IT'S ABOUT THE PROCESS, NOT THE PROJECT*

When talking about Gebrookerbos, it is important to distinguish between the process and the project. Although it was set up as a project, that received funding and had a start and end date, Gebrookerbos was about creating a process, a method of working. The project officially commenced in 2016 and ended in 2020, and project reports are being published in 2021, but the method of working is still ongoing. Also, the support of the "brooker" was more oriented towards the process of the initiatives:

> *"I think that the citizens, the initiatives, they liked it, that they had the responsibility, without somebody taking over or is playing the boss. […] It is a network where autonomy is very important, and working together. From the internal motivation and power, not due to formal agreements." (Brooker, 2020)*

Hence, the Gebrookerbos project, that received funding from the IBA as an initial step, was necessary to get the project going. However, the aim of the project was to develop a process, a method, that would continue long after the project is done. This ultimately led to a law being passed in 2021, that states that urban planning will be conducted by starting on the very top of the participation ladder (see Arnstein), meaning that citizens get the lead. Only if this is not possible, only then the municipality will consider stepping down one level and getting more involved:

> *"This is very risky to say that! […] I think they realized that the municipality is not Lord and Master over urban development. But also that people.. […] This is an awareness." (Brooker, 2020)*

## *THE COMPLEXITY OF MANAGING URBAN CHALLENGES: CONFLICTS AROUND GEBROOKERBOS INITIATIVES*

While most of the initiatives where conducted in Heerlen Noord, there were also a few in the city center, such as the "Stadstuin Heerlen", a neighborhood park in the heart of the city. Criticism towards implementing a civic initiative in this location was very prominent, as from an economic and planning point of view, a compact and densely built up city center is a strong point of cities.

> *"And the people were saying: 'no, we need to do this here, it is a green part of town, it is a calm spot. We don't need to put cement and concrete everywhere'. And from the municipality they were saying: 'no, we need to have a compact heart of the city and it needs to be built on'. That was a dilemma. A clash of two cultures […] that see a different future" (Brooker, 2020)*

Temporality of these types of initiatives was an important factor as well. While a lot of initiatives were implemented on grounds that according to statistics would not be needed for the long-term due to ongoing population loss, it was made clear for others, that if there would be interest from investors to build on these grounds, the initiatives would have to give way to those.

> *"So this was a very clear point, to be very clear to initiatives to say okay, this is something temporary […]." (Monitoring Researcher, 2020)*

This point constitutes a friction between the municipality and the initiatives:

> *"And Gebrookerbos tries to have this view, well, if you don't have this commercial party and you have all these open spaces, why would you waste it by just letting it be there […]" (Monitoring Researcher, 2020)*

A common challenge in shrinking cities constitutes social deprivation, such as problems with the youth that does not have proper opportunities or assistance. Usage of drugs and lingering of youth at abandoned places have been challenges that Heerlen has been dealing with for a long time. The friction between citizens and the municipality in one specific case related to these issues shows the complexity of giving as much freedom as possible for conducting initiatives on the one hand, but also trying to manage such problems on the other. A fairly large area that was left behind and now rediscovered from a citizen initiative was a common hot spot for the unemployed youth and drug users, which was very apparent due to syringes laying on the grounds of this space. After a group of citizens applied to reinvent this area for their children, and convert it into a park with an adjacent butterfly garden, the municipality said yes, under one condition: they had to provide space and include the youth that was knowingly hanging around this area. The brooker remembers:

> *"After two years they said, okay we are not doing this with the youth. […] But, this was two years that were ruined already. And the trust was reduced to a zero." (Brooker, 2020)*

## *OWNERSHIP OF LAND AND INFORMAL AGREEMENTS*

One of the aspects that can be a barrier or an accelerating factor is the issue of ownership of land on which the micro-initiatives were realized. Temporary citizen initiatives can be difficult to realize on privately owned grounds. However, in the case of Gebrookerbos, many of the empty areas were owned by the municipality, because they were former schools or other public facilities that had to be closed due to oversupply and the shrinking population. In the case of Bongaardpark, Miriam says:

*"It belongs to Woonpunt, a housing corporation. [...] There is no signed contract but we have a guaranty for 30 years." (Miriam, 2021)*

In the case of another initiative, De Dobbeltuin, Leo mentions that the grounds also do not belong to the city, but to a corporation that has many other empty terrains in the city. He explains:

*" […] we are unique here. And that's why I think they don't go and make new houses over there." (Leo, 2021)*

## A PLETHORA OF FUNDING POOLS TO ENSURE LONGEVITY

The question of longevity of these initiatives was accompanying the project from the beginning. Although, the question of finances is reflected by the project manager like this:

*"[…] we even saw that money is not even the most important thing, because they will find their way. […] We started Gebrookerbos funding and there was 200.000 in it. We started in June 2018, so we have it for a while, but I think 100.000 Euros now is spent and the other half not." (Project Manager, 2020)*

Apart from the Gebrookerbos funding, and the IBA funding, a national funding pool was made available "VSB" who continue to support civic initiatives in the country. Additionally, "Frisse Wind" was introduced as a framework for distributing the donations from VSB. Further, two follow-up projects were implemented to ensure the continuation of the method in Heerlen. The first one, "Stadslab Heerlen", an urban laboratory for creatives and artists who, with the help of a new brooker, can find vacant spaces for their initiatives, while using the Gebrookerbos method. The second, "N-Power" is an international project between Belgium, Germany and The Netherlands with the focus of civic initiatives. There, initiators of projects in Heerlen get the chance to talk and present their initiatives, and learn from each other. (Brooker, 2020)

## 10.5 ACTORS, MOTIVATIONS AND RELATIONS

Investigating and unpacking the roles of the government and the citizens in civic initiatives is a core interest of this thesis. Tracing those along a perspectival approach that was described in Figure 3, this chapter takes a close look at the actors, who were already mentioned in chapter 10.4 GEBROOKERBOS: REVITALIZATION 2.0, and reflects their relations, means and motivations, resources and values. There is still a noticeable gap in the literature addressing the specific role of governments in civic initiatives. Reflecting the actor constellations against the conditions of long-term shrinkage in Heerlen, and the governmental ladder of participation gives insight into changes in local governance under conditions of shrinkage and further, the devolution of tasks to citizens.

Shrinking cities and regions can be regarded as frontrunners in civic action, novel forms of participatory processes or community-led planning. On the one hand, this is true because some governments have realized that shrinkage requires a large-scale rethinking of responsibilities and roles, if maintaining quality of life is the goal. On the other hand, fiscal austerity that leads to cuts in personnel, requires a devolution of tasks. In any case, shrinkage pressures actors on all scales to implement changes to create new possibilities and maintain certain standards for the population that resides in such areas.

Although Gebrookerbos is marketed as a bottom-up approach were citizens have the lead, a more in-depth and critical view on the actual involvement of the various actors accentuates the division between “initiators” and “participants”. Further, they can be grouped into “directly” and “indirectly” involved actors. Directly involved actors include the municipality, the brooker, account managers, and citizens. Indirectly involved actors are Neimed, Open Universiteit, the Province Limburg, IBA and Interreg, the latter ones being funders in their main role. However, as the analysis in the previous chapter described, the municipality was the main initiating actor of the Gebrookerbos project, not citizens themselves. Although, in the micro-initiatives, citizens do play the leading role, Gebrookerbos as a project, is not a bottom-up develop process. Even the three areas, that act as a frame for the micro-initiatives, have been defined by the municipality and the other actors who were involved in 2014 when the first ideas were discussed, namely, Neimed and Open Universiteit. In Figure 23 below, a representation of the mentioned actors and their involvement is visually presented. In a next step, the relations between the actors and the type of relationship is approached. This allows to critically engage with the topic of devolution of tasks and “responsibilization”. (Pill, 2022; Klein et al., 2017).

The actor network of Gebrookerbos is shaped by relationships of various expressions and values. The analysis in the previous chapter highlights a contested relation between the municipality and citizens which is based on historical events, such as the rapid closure of the mining industry. The hierarchical and compliance-base relationship between the mining workers, their bosses and the Church created a path dependency of a challenged relationship between government officials and society in general, because it was transferred from one generation to another. The period of the heroin pandemic and prostitution did not create an inviting environment for the development of effective relations between the municipality and citizens, either. The development of active citizenship in Heerlen is therefore a very recent progress. Nevertheless, the Gebrookerbos project created opportunities for citizens to realize their visions and therefore directly impacted the relationship between the municipality and citizens. However, the very formal circumstances and the definition of

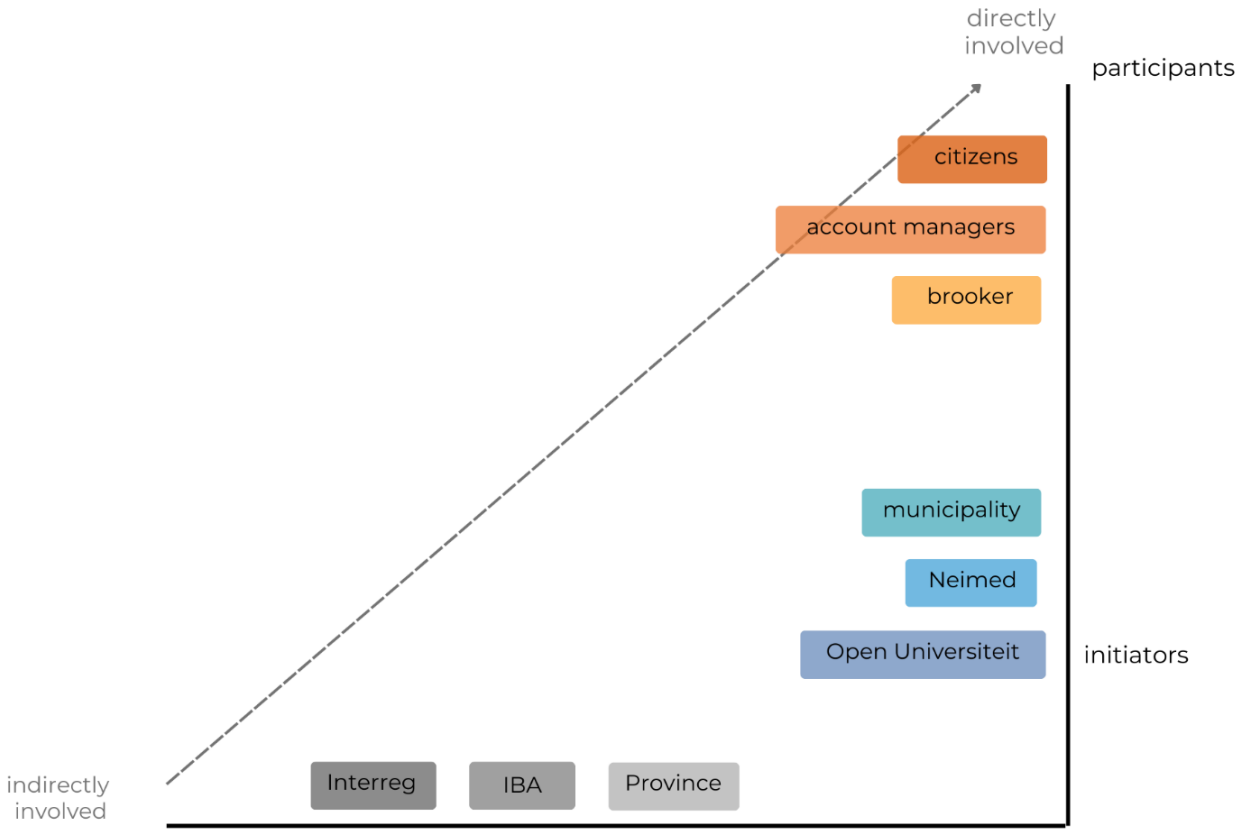


Figure 23. Actors and Involvement in Gebrookerbos. Author's own.

only three themes for civic initiatives are evidence of a controlled project. The relation is also based on a contractual agreement, which is signed by both parties and declared, that citizens take full responsibility for the respective plot of land.

The relations between the brooker and citizens and the account managers and citizens are similar. Both, the brooker and the account managers act as facilitators and intermediaries between citizens and the municipality. Both want to help citizens to get their ideas realized, albeit on different levels. The brooker has a very direct and informal relationship with some of the citizens who want to initiate projects. He is involved on the ground, visits the sites and motivates citizens to start their initiatives. The brooker also assists in communication between citizens and account managers. The brooker is a neutral person, as he is not employed by the municipality, but by Neimed and therefore has an in-between role. The brooker is one person, who is in contact with almost all micro-initiatives, and who is very well connected and knows people very well. He therefore has a very close relationship with the people who are involved in Gebrookerbos initiatives. The account managers on the other side are a handful of civil servants. They are not newly employed people, but have been working in the municipality before. Their role is interesting, because they are change makers. They have an intrinsic motivation to create easy and direct processes and get rid of the burdening bureaucracy that has been keeping citizens from getting involved. They have to convince their co-workers who haven't shifted their mindset (yet), in order to make things happen. Each account manager is in charge of several micro-initiatives and looks after them from beginning to end. However, the account managers are also in close contact with the municipality, because they still work in the same facility, and job, being civil servants. It therefore likely, that it takes citizens some time to understand the shift of mindset and administrative flows and develop trust towards account managers. The citizens however, rely on the effort of the account managers to get their ideas realized and sometimes even find creative ways to do so.

The relations between the municipality and Neimed or Open Universiteit are not as prominent in the network. However, they have been the initiators of Gebrookerbos, and therefore the idea of micro-initiatives and an increased civic engagement needs to be credited to them. More so, the processes of changing the profiles of civil servants to account managers and introducing such change makers in the municipality is highly important to accelerate governance changes. The roles of IBA, Interreg and the Province are marginal when considering the direct influence and involvement in the micro-initiatives. Still, funding does play a crucial part in Gebrookerbos and IBA Parkstad functioned as a frame for developing such an innovative project. According to the project report authored by Neimed, a Gebrookerbos Fund was set up in 2018 and the municipality of Heerlen, the Province of Limburg and IBA Parkstad contributed 200,000€ in total (Neimed, 2020a). This fund allowed initiators to jump start their undertaking. As stated by the project manager, not even half of this budget was spent in the first year while sixteen initiatives have benefited in this time period (Neimed, 2020a).

The municipal role in Gebrookerbos is fundamental. As initiator of the project and process Gebrookerbos and part of the network of funding actors, the municipality of Heerlen has various roles. When talking about “the municipality”, I refer to the project manager, because she is representing the municipal part. However, taking a closer look, the account managers technically count as the municipality as well. The project manager is distinctive, as her views on shrinkage, and seeing the potential in vacant areas are pivotal in convincing not only funding agencies to contribute, but also other civil servants in the municipal office. The goal of the municipality in the first place however, is the revitalization of empty spaces at a low cost. Figure *24* below illustrates these findings in a visual representation and combines the actors and their involvement, their relations as well as motivations. In the figure, the motivations of the actors Neimed and Open Universiteit have been left out, as the information on their motivation is scarce.

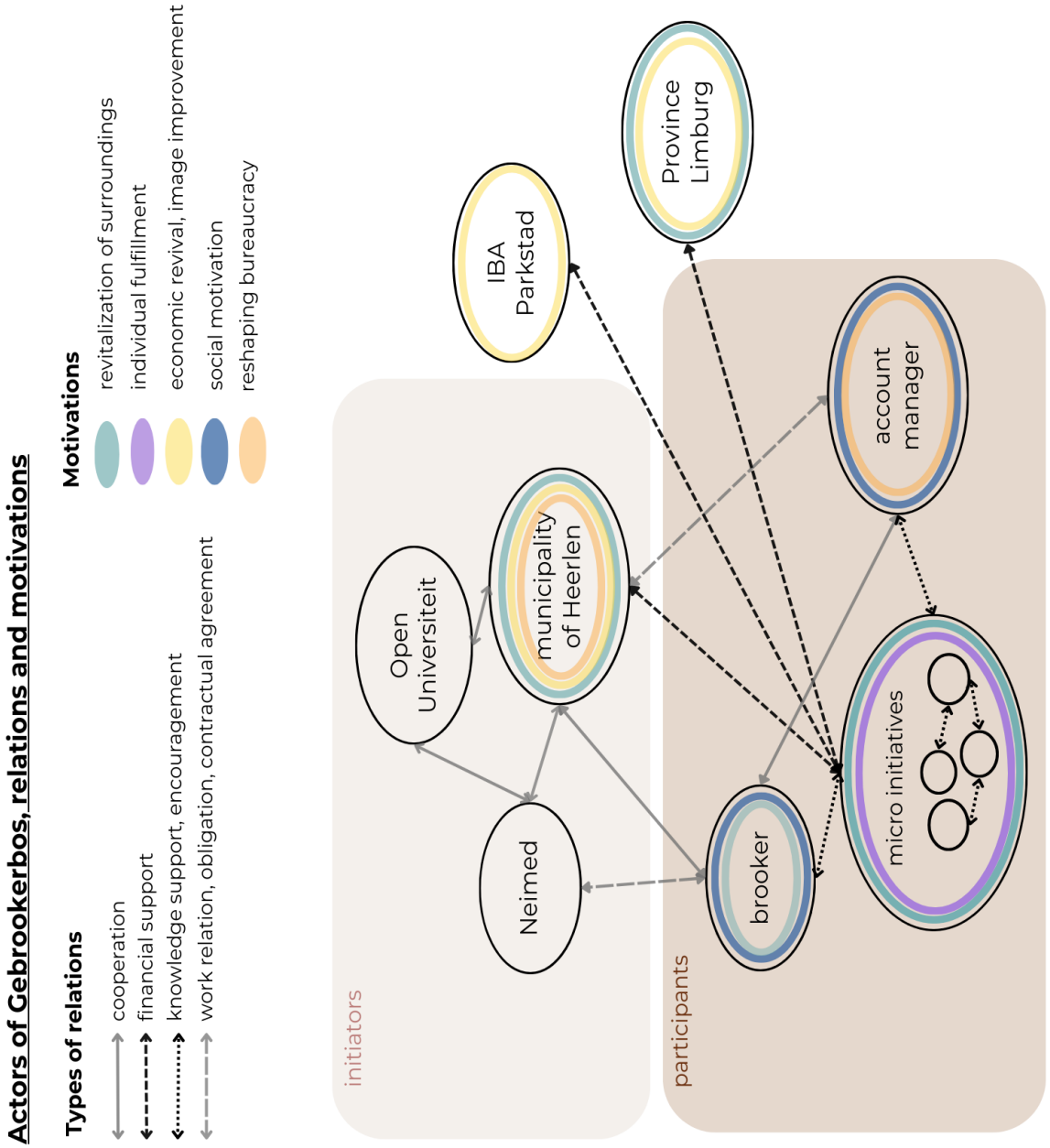


Figure 24. Actors of Gebrookerbos, relations and motivations. Author's own.

## *REVISITING THE GOVERNMENTAL PARTICIPATION LADDER*

The governmental participation ladder as introduced by the Council of Public Administration in Figure 15 (p.107) describes the efforts of the government towards a more vertical governance and a network society that works collaboratively on todays' challenges. The results presented in the previous chapters show an ambivalent picture. The municipality as initiator of the project, who defined the themes for the initiatives and plays a role in the selection process of the pool of projects, frames Gebrookerbos as a bottom-up process. The municipality provides a set of account managers to facilitate this undertaking and recruits a brooker, who is employed by the knowledge institute Neimed, to scout residents and spaces and engages them to participate in Gebrookerbos. At several instances even, the municipality talks about "letting go", therefore, the first stage of governmental participation in civic initiatives. The next two steps on the ladder however, "facilitate" and "stimulate" seem to be more fitting. Letting go implies that decision-making power is transferred and roles are rearranged. Since in Gebrookerbos, the decision-making power on the higher levels of Gebrookerbos, regarding the timeline, the budget, the topics and so on, still belongs to the municipality. Citizen acquire decision-making power only within their micro-initiative, if it fits the assorted set of themes. It is true, that the municipality has let go of their traditional way of governing, however, only with regards to Gebrookerbos. Still, the account managers were reporting that a lot of convincing within the municipality had to take place to get some of the micro-initiatives through. The step of "facilitating" stresses the role of the government as a facilitator for civic initiatives whereas "stimulating" refers to projects the government would like to see being realized, but leaves this part to society. These steps very well summarize Gebrookerbos in their facilitating role, through the implementation of account manager-roles as well as the brooker-role and streamlining the governance process. Further, "directing" refers to processes where the government has the lead, invites society with an extended involvement. Therefore, Gebrookerbos in its various stages and on different scales can be located on different steps of the governmental participation ladder. Initially, "regisseren", or "directing" is found fitting, and through the years of the process, Gebrookerbos moves to "stimuleren", or "stimulate" to "faciliteren", or "facilitating", to, finally "loslaten", or "letting go", on the micro-scale of civic initiatives.

The following chapter GEBROOKERBOS IN A TIMELINE: PHASES AND SCALES refers to these conclusions and visualizes the involvement of the government at various stages and on different scales throughout the process Gebrookerbos.

## *GEBROOKERBOS IN A TIMELINE: PHASES AND SCALES*

The government's role in civic initiatives such as Gebrookerbos, is not easily defined. There is an obvious ambivalence between the claim of creating a bottom-up process, which in itself is contradicting. Bottom-up processes in their definition are usually not developed and started by the government. However, citizens at a later point do acquire ownership of the process and a certain degree of freedom over realizing their initiatives. Figure *25* divides Gebrookerbos into six stages that become evident in the descriptive chapter of results. At the same time, the figure localizes the stages on a scale from regional to micro-level and defines the role of the government in the various stages. It becomes evident, that Gebrookerbos is a process that did not start from a bottom-up initiative. Gebrookerbos in the first place is a municipal project that was developed jointly with Neimed and the Open Universiteit and later on moves down the hierarchical structure to finally become a civic project. However, citizens only become the owners of their initiatives in the very last stage, after they have participated in an open call and their project idea got selected.

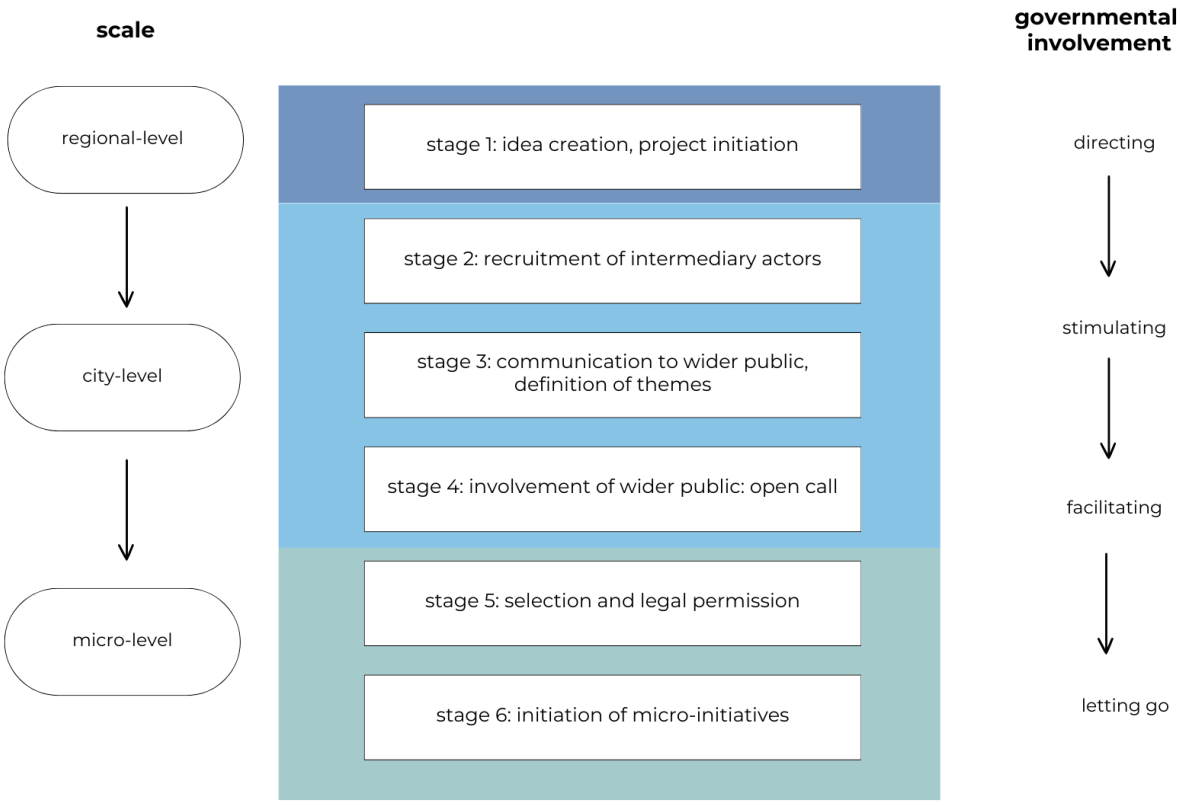


Figure 25. Gebrookerbos in a timeline. Author's own.

## 10.6 GEBROOKERBOS AND EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE: NEW WINE IN AN OLD BOTTLE?

The results presented in the previous chapters point to two main conclusions related to municipal capacity and democratic quality within experimental governance for co-productive approaches in times of shrinkage.

First, the analysis of the actors involved in the Gebrookerbos project and method shows that they are relatively homogenous – educated, employed and either working in official positions related to the project, or have spare time to spend on Gebrookerbos. Citizens have been selected because they have been already involved in micro-initiatives, or given a frame for application. Therefore, little scope for a truly co-creative process that involves citizens in the idea creation phase, was given by Gebrookerbos. Rather, the idea creation phase was dominated and executed by the municipality, limiting democratic quality in this stage of an experimental approach significantly. The process of Gebrookerbos which is a key ingredient in the success of experimental governance, is not transparent from the beginning as it does not represent all relevant stakeholders. This significantly impairs the co-creation (iv) characteristic of urban experimentation (see chapter 9.3 EXPERIMENTS IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT: EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE OR GOVERNANCE EXPERIMENTATION? p.78), reproducing old participatory traditions.

Second, the results of the processual analysis show in detail that municipal capacity for organizing and managing a project like Gebrookerbos in a shrinking city, is given. They have been successful in acquiring funds to set up the Gebrookerbos-Atlas as a small project previous to commencing Gebrookerbos, funds to allocate to citizens for their micro-initiatives, internal capacity to allocate new tasks to account managers as well as funds and organizational capacity for events with the focus of knowledge-creation. These findings highlight the fact, that much capacity-building efforts have been undertaken by the municipality to execute internal and external practices attached to Gebrookerbos. However, looking at these results critically and from the perspective of experimental governance, an overrepresentation of the municipality as actor in various stages is visible, affecting the characteristics co-creation (iv), (v) empowerment and (ii) innovative methods of urban experimentation.

These two main findings are further elaborated in the sections below.

## *THE CO-CREATION ASPECT OF EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE – LEADING VOICES AND DEMOCRATIC QUALITY*

Local governments play a crucial role in experimental governance and the majority of experimental projects (Bulkeley et al., 2016; Eneqvist et al., 2022) as partner, facilitator, leader (Castán Broto and Bulkeley, 2013; Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren, 2018) as well as protector of public values (Sørensen et al., 2021) while stepping down from their traditional role as authority and sole decision-maker. In the procedural analysis of the Dutch case "Gebrookerbos", a mismatch of these attributes and the findings is noticeable. Municipal actors are prominent in critical stages of the process, making Gebrookerbos a heavily facilitated and top-down steered project and process. Especially the first steps of the project initiation and set up, the interests of citizens where not represented, as they were only invited at a later stage. This is in line with the findings of Bulkeley and Castán Broto (2013, p. 373), who conclude that "experiments are often vested with particular interests and strategic purpose in the governing of the city". In the case of Gebrookerbos, the strategic purpose of the municipality outweighs the experimental character and co-creative characteristic. The strategic purpose of filling empty and underused spaces with cost-effective micro-projects stands out over the relevance of citizens in the decision-making arena of the project. The results of the analysis show, that citizens are relevant actors in the project, however only at a certain point and time, defined by the municipality. At this point, citizens are given relatively much freedom in how they design their micro-initiatives. These findings support the conclusions by Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren (2018), who point out the role of the municipality oftentimes varies within the timeline of one project or experiment. As the leading actor of Gebrookerbos, the findings further suggest, that the municipality holds the power in governing the collaboration (see Vangen et al., 2015). Therefore, democratic quality of an experimental approach is found to be hindered in expanding its potential of a truly co-creative approach that puts citizens first. Democratic quality is even questioned, as some of the findings point to participation being used as a stopgap to replace public services by saying *"We let go of the masterplan, [and] actually say 'citizens, it's up to you'" (Project Manager, 2020, see chapter 10.4* GEBROOKERBOS: REVITALIZATION 2.0*).* Contradicting this, authors Juujärvi and Pesso (2013) find that different levels and extent of civic participation in urban experimentation can be successful. On this basis, they suggest a mix of both, bottom-up and top-down approaches for different stages of the process. From an empowerment point of view however, informing citizens about already made decisions and involving them wherever it is more convenient, or achieves the purpose of legitimizing a project, is very conflictual.

## *BEYOND PROJECT ORIENTATION – STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND LONGEVITY*

One core element of experimental governance considers the long lasting effects of singular projects as well as a transformation in the form of substantive and structural change (Mitlin, 2008; Potjer, 2019). In order to overcome this so-called "projectification" (Torrens and Wirth, 2021), Gebrookerbos is conceptualized as method and process, not a project per se. This section discusses to what extent the Dutch case actually met this claim. On the one hand, several actions have been taken and programs developed to ensure the sustainability of Gebrookerbos in the form of various follow-up projects that carry on the core thought of Gebrookerbos. On the other hand, however, only limited structural transformation is noticeable that enters the arena of decision-making. The implementation of the role of the account manager for the purpose of streamlining lengthy bureaucratic processes citizens have to go through theoretically is a very good approach. Practically, this innovation showed its fruits as citizens report to have had experienced a pleasant process from idea formulation to execution. The creation of the role of account managers was technically achieved by shifting and condensing responsibilities to already employed civil servants. This shows, that innovation can take place from endogenous capacity by implementing incremental shifts. It can be understood as a very good first step towards structural transformation of the strong sectoral work within administrations. Account managers in the Dutch case "Gebrookerbos" work across all necessary sectors that come into touch with civic participation. This requires a realization that "silo-oriented" traditional work within administrations does not serve the purpose of experimental governance and a serious step towards cross-sectoral roles. Nevertheless, these changes are a result of internal shifts and task allocations and have not been subject of discussion in a co-creative moment. The conclusion of this section therefore contrasts some academic literature on experimental governance. For example, Eneqvist and Karvonen (2021, p. 184) stress, that experimental governance "involves governing through experimental practices rather than experimenting with the governance system itself", but the Dutch case of Gebrookerbos indicates the latter, although in a very cautious manner.

## *MUNICIPAL CAPACITY BUILDING IN SHRINKING CITIES – OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS*

Experiments in the urban realm have become the new norm in cities. Shrinking cities however pose a series of limitations that would internalize experimentation as a new mode of governing them. Such limitations are obvious, namely a lack of financial resources and severe cutbacks, economic downturn, a negative image, uncertainty about future demographic development, declining critical

mass of citizens to be engaged in urban transformations and major problem areas regarding oversupply of infrastructure or social challenges. While these limitations are general, they do apply to the Dutch case under investigation to some extent. Nevertheless, this exact case also highlights, that limitations can be turned over and transformed to opportunities for enabling urban experimentation, if there is a serious intention for change. The plethora of vacant spaces, a distinctive drive of "old" residents to reinvent their city and change the image, are just some of the opportunities that allow for experimentation in shrinking cities. With the amount of pressing issues in shrinking cities, experimentation can be a task that is pushed far down on the political agenda. As Karvonen (2018) points out, experimental governance is "characterized by uncertainty, recursive learning processes, and spatial fragmentation with multiple implications on the politics of cities in the future". Precisely such characteristics make it even more difficult to convince municipalities to engage with experiments. Above all, shrinkage can be a state of conservative mindset, as tax returns have declined and public administrations should be careful about how they spend them. Experimentation therefore naturally comes after the pressing day to day issues. When it comes to financial resources, the political agenda is very sensitive in shrinking cities, resulting in a cautious selection of projects. Similarly, due to scarce financial resources, human resources within municipalities experience a cut back, too. The scope for organizational capacity to introduce new processes and innovations, is therefore lacking. In a similar way as Evans et al. (2021), the findings of "Gebrookerbos" point out, that re-shuffling organizations in the way they work is a crucial step. They show that re-organizing existing human resources can be a successful way towards experimental governance, if there is a tight bottle-neck. It is a matter of smart allocation of resources and connecting them with specific goals. This can lead to an institutional setting that allows for urban experimentation in times of crises. After all, municipalities "have governmental capabilities and powers that other urban organisations do not" (Evans et al., 2021, p. 174), and this still applies in a critical shrinking context.

## *SMALL STEPS TOWARDS THE EXPERIMENTAL TURN IN HEERLEN*

Taken together, the discussed findings of the Gebrookerbos case show that from the lens of experimental governance, the project portrays a differentiated picture. Looking at the five characteristics that distinguish urban experimentation (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013), few of them are actually fulfilled. First, sustainability goals are addressed to a certain extent. The focus on a "green theme", namely nature-based projects or urban farming, have been chosen by the municipality to transform the open areas that have emerged after the mining industry was shut down. This transitions from a "dark" coal valley to a green future, is pointing towards a sustainable goal. Second, innovative methods have been used only in a limited manner. The installation of account managers can be

regarded as innovative method that serves the process. However, methods that directly involve and address citizens, or, have been developed together with citizens, are missing. Third, the micro-initiatives which are initiated and executed by citizens, can be defined as place-based approaches. They represent on-site small-scale transformation, even though they are short-lived and time-restricted. Fourth, the co-creation moment which has been already scrutinized previously, is clearly lacking in the majority of steps within the Gebrookerbos process. Lastly, empowerment is evaluated in a similar way. Empowerment of citizens cannot be achieved, if they are not met at eye-level and involved in decision-making processes. According to Ročak et al. (2016b), empowerment is achieved if people are given a platform to voice their opinions and are listened to, if people are involved in critical decision-making processes and, if people can take actions on their own to trigger changes. In the case of Gebrookerbos, only the latter aspect is achieved, when citizens are given the opportunity to initiate micro-initiatives.

Concluding, the findings of the Dutch case "Gebrookerbos" show that small steps towards experimental governance have been taken, although critical elements are not addressed. Rather, the Gebrookerbos initiative is legitimized by the municipal government and does not fit the definition of a "bottom-up" process or co-creative approach. Therefore, this section summarizes the Gebrookerbos process and project as an invited space of participation (Cornwall, 2004), that still holds onto a traditional understanding of participation, by inviting citizens at a relatively late stage in the process, for a time-restricted period and within pre-defined themes to contribute their ideas.

# 11 MUNICIPAL INFORMALITY ACCELERATING EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF FREIRAUMGALERIE IN HALLE(SAALE), GERMANY

Plenty of case studies can be found that would be fitting to study shrinkage in the context of Germany, and specifically Eastern Germany. Demographic decline in Germany (former FRG as well as GDR) started in the 1960s/1970s. In fact, birth rates were higher in Eastern Germany than in the former FRG until the 1990. Urban shrinkage due to demographic decline therefore has been on the research agenda for a long time. However, civic participation and active citizenship have not been connected to revitalization strategies until recently. In general, Germany shows a relatively low participation rate in formal (28.6%) and informal (11.4%) voluntary activities (Eurostat, 2021). Paired with the "trivialization" of shrinkage (Hospers, 2014) as guiding mantra during the first years after the German reunification, active citizenship might not have had a thriving framework to grow. The case of Freiraumgalerie in Halle(Saale) is a particular one. Halle(Saale), the largest city in the state of Saxony-Anhalt with a leading industrial hub in GDR times has experienced dramatic economic downturn following deindustrialization and subsequently, large-scale outmigration following the German reunification (Radzimski, 2018). With a vacancy rate of nearly 60% and railway tracks physically and mentally isolating the district Freiimfelde from the rest of the city, the neighborhood was declared not special enough to designate policy programs for revitalization. A blank canvas developed: a forgotten area in Halle, that did not have enough value, a city that today inhabits 242.000 people (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022).

Halle(Saale) has been on the research agenda for many years now. EU Projects such as "Shrink Smart" have researched the case since 2009, while academic papers emerged soon after. Radzimski (2018) for example draws attention to the neighborhood Halle-Glaucha with regard to the governance of regeneration strategies. A plethora of articles on Halle(Saale) was published by the Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Naturschutz, Bau und Reaktorsicherheit (Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Construction and Nuclear Safety), the Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning) or the urban development and nature department of the city of Halle(Saale). Several publications on the topic of Freiraumgalerie appeared parallel to its emergence and growing impact in Hall/Saale after 2011.

# 11.1HALLE(SAALE): THE PHASES OF SHRINKAGE

Halle(Saale) is the largest city in the federal state Saxony-Anhalt (Sachsen-Anhalt) and was the leading chemical industry hub in GDR times. Today, the city counts 242,000 inhabitants (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022), of which around 20,000 are students. Saxony-Anhalt is located between the federal states Brandenburg in the East, Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen) in the West, Thüringen in the South-West and Saxony in the South-East (Figure *26*). Magdeburg and Halle(Saale) both have a tradition of holding the name of capital of the state. Many political debates were held to decide about the capital Saxony-Anhalt after the German reunification. Since 1990, Magdeburg has been the voted capital, while Halle(Saale) remains the largest city in the state.


Figure 26. Localization of Halle(Saale) within Germany. Author's own.

Halle(Saale) was hit by the effects of the German reunification in an extraordinary way. The city as pictured in Figure 28, is a result of two re-unified parts: the "old" Halle and "Halle-Neustadt", located in the Western part of Halle. Halle and Halle-Neustadt were originally separated in 1967 (Rink et al., 2011). Halle-Neustadt was predominantly populated by industrial workers, as the facilities of the chemical industry were located there. Therefore, this part of Halle grew very fast in population size in the 1960s and 70s while the old part of the city experienced population loss (ibid.). In fact, during GDR times, the old part of Halle experienced continuous population loss due to neglect of housing infrastructure. Halle-Neustadt and the prefabricated housing estates that emerged there, attracted the population of Halle's older city parts. The German reunification and the following deindustrialization however, triggered shrinkage and significant population losses in the whole city of Halle(Saale), concentrating in Halle-Neustadt, the industrial hub.

Halle(Saale) has experienced different phases of shrinkage that were caused by diverse reasons (see Figure 27). The first phase of shrinkage (Fliegner and Loebner, 2014) became apparent after the German reunification. Between the years 1989 and 1993 the city lost around one tenth of its population due to outmigration to the major cities in the west and south of Germany. This outmigration was motivated by job losses in Halle(Saale). Rink et al. (2011) refer to this phase as "massive" outmigration and conclude that 80 per cent of the population loss can be traced back to job-related outmigration to other parts of the country. In addition, this outmigration was of selective nature and caused so called brain drain, a common phenomenon when the younger and educated population leaves.

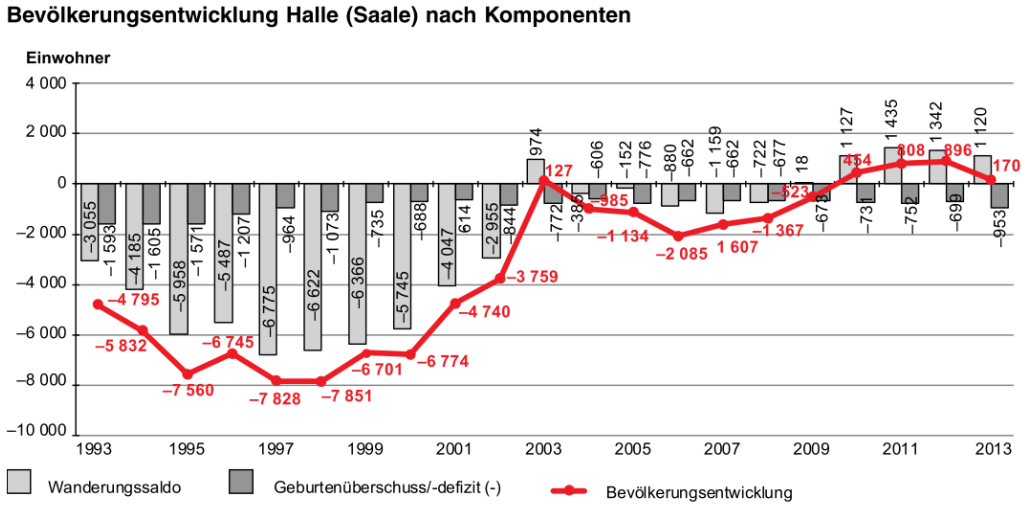


Figure 27. Demographic development in Halle(Saale). Source: Fliegner & Loeb (2014)

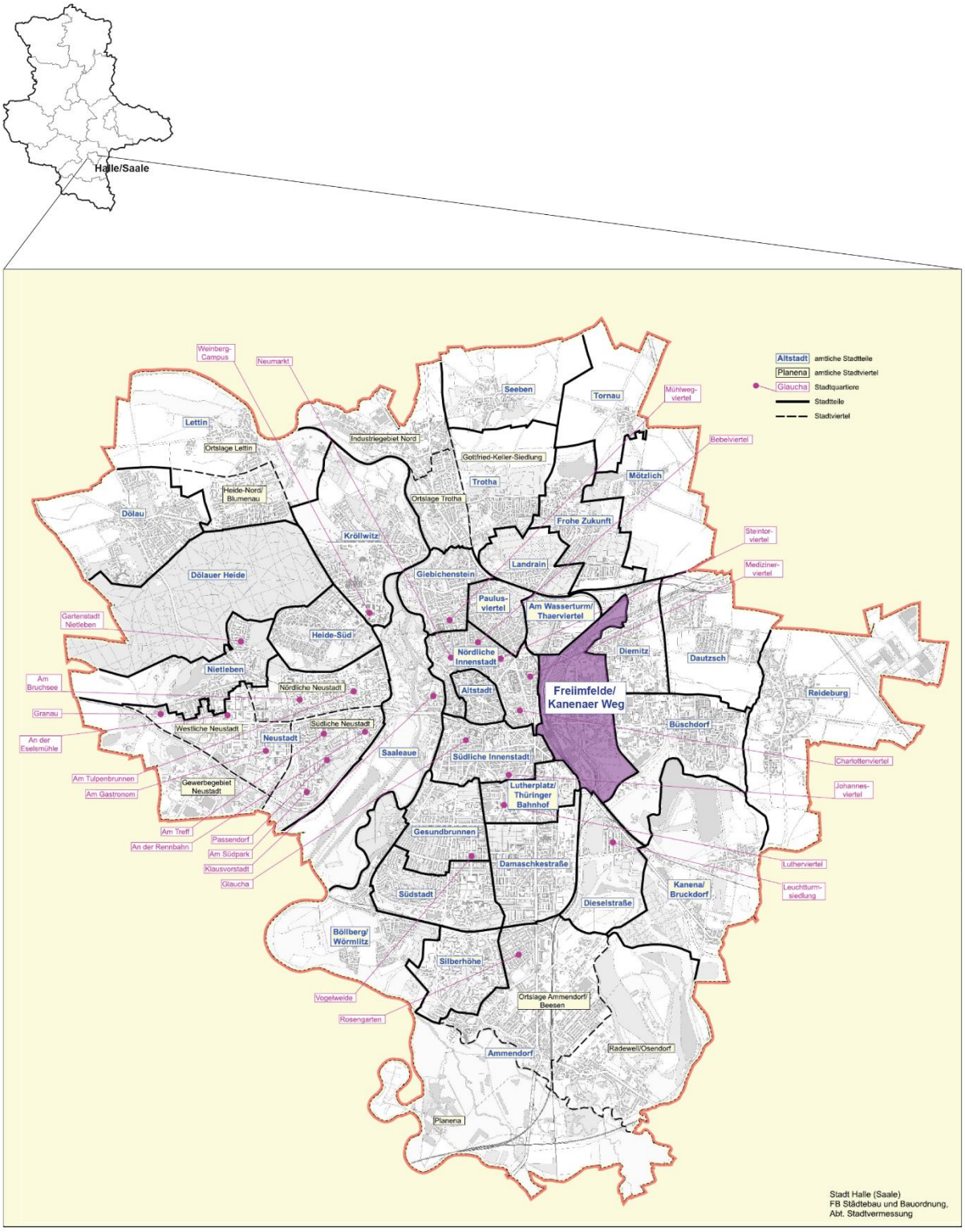


Figure 28. Localization of Halle(Saale) within Saxony-Anhalt and district Freiimfelde within Halle(Saale). Adaptation of map by FB Städtebau und Bauordnung, Abt. Stadtvermessung.

The second phase of shrinkage was triggered by suburbanization patterns and peaked in 1997 and 1998 (ibid.). Around 37,000 inhabitants moved to the suburban area of Halle(Saale) (Rink et al., 2011) in this phase. Afterwards, the reasons for population loss were mainly the natural population development and migration and shrinkage lost its severity. However, selective outmigration paired with low birth rates have intensified the ageing of the population, as Table 3 demonstrates. The figure specifically shows how the share of people in the age groups 0-65 declines between 1989 and 2008 while the share of people 65 and older grows. Table 4 was developed according to latest data by Landesportal Sachsen-Anhalt (2023) and shows the development of the same age groups in the years 2010, 2016 and 2022 in absolute numbers. It therefore demonstrates that the number of people of the age group 65 and older continued to grow after 2010, whereas the age groups 0-15 and 15-65 grew as well or stabilized. The trend of a brain drain and selective out migration thus slowed down, or stopped. According to Rink et al. (2011) population loss due to out-migration has come to a halt in 2003.

Table 3. Age groups in Halle(Saale) 1989-2008. Source: Rink et al. (2011)

| | 1989* | 1996 | 2000 | 2008 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Share of people 0-14 | 19.2 | 13.5 | 11.1 | 10.8 |
| Share of people 15-65 | 66.3 | 71.8 | 71.9 | 66.2 |
| Share of people 65 and older | 14.5 | 14.7 | 17.1 | 23.1 |
| Youth dependency rate (0-14/15-64, per cent) | 28.9 | 18.8 | 15.4 | 15.6 |
| Age dependency rate (65+/15-64, per cent) | 21.8 | 20.5 | 23.7 | 33.4 |
| Index of ageing (65+/0-14, per cent) | 75.5 | 108.9 | 154.0 | 214.1 |
| Average age | n.a. | n.a. | 42.8 | 45.1 |
| Number of people aged 65-79 | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |
| Number of people aged 80+ | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. | n.a. |
| Number of people aged 65+ | 33,406 | 40,494 | 42,031 | 53,260 |

* without Halle-Neustadt
Source: UFZ database

Table 4. Age groups in Halle(Saale) 2010-2022. Own presentation according to data from Landesportal Sachsen Anhalt (2023).

**inhabitants per age group**

| age/year | 2010 | 2016 | 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0-15 | 26.478 | 30.457 | 33.263 |
| 15-65 | 151.906 | 150.919 | 150.495 |
| 65 and older | 54.579 | 56.629 | 58.325 |

Halle's population developed in an uneven way across the city. From the 1990s onwards, different pathways of development were noticeable (Rink et al., 2011), namely that while some parts were losing population, others had stabilized or were even growing. These trends have lost their severity during the 2000s when new patterns such as gentrification emerged and impacted areas such as the inner-city and therefore contributed to a renaissance of this part of the city due to their attractive old housing stock.

Since around 2009 Halle's population has stabilized and slight growth can be traced. One of the most significant factors that has contributed to this development is educational immigration to the city (Fliegner and Loebner, 2014). The University of Halle(Saale) as well as the art school have attracted many students, which today make up around 10% of Halle's population.

## 11.2 REVITALIZATION EFFORTS IN HALLE(SAALE): DOWNSIZING POLICIES AND STADTUMBAU OST

The German reunification had long-lasting and intense effects on the urban fabric, quality of life and the job market in the five eastern German states and Berlin. The federal urban restructuring program "Stadtumbau Ost"[5] was developed by the German government in 2000 as a reaction to the housing vacancy and deterioration of housing stock in shrinking cities. The commission under Heinrich Lehmann-Grube advised that shrinkage should be managed within the proposed framework of Stadtumbau Ost (Pfeiffer et al., 2000). It was decided that shrinkage would be managed by demolition of the surplus of housing stock that became apparent due to the immense population loss. For this purpose, funds were made available to demolish housing stock, upgrade urban infrastructure, to implement re-use projects for vacant lots and to improve the quality of public spaces. The program commenced in 2002 and ended, after one extension, in 2016. A total budget of 5,1 billion Euros were made available in total to accomplish the goals of Stadtumbau Ost. Through Stadtumbau Ost around 1,200 measures and projects were funded in over 490 cities in East Germany (Städtebauförderung, 2022). The moderate success of the first phase of this undertaking triggered an updating and adaptation of the program and the set up of new forms of subsidies. Such funding made it possible for municipalities to acquire houses for the purpose of renovation or preservation until sufficient funds were available for renovation.

[5] A short introduction and explanation of "Stadtumbau Ost" was already introduced as a footnote on page 51.

The counterpart to Stadtumbau Ost – Stadtumbau West commenced in 2004 and brought to attention the challenges of shrinkage and structural change in Western Germany. Finally, in 2017 the two programs were merged into the new program Stadtumbau (Städtebauförderung, 2022).

The federal program Stadtumbau Ost presents a case of planning for shrinkage (Haase et al., 2014). The deliberate demolition of surplus infrastructure, such as housing and social and technical infrastructures has been developed as a vision and implemented as a program for shrinking cities to accommodate the dwindling population. Such "right-sizing" policies aim at stabilizing the housing market due to minimizing the vacancy rate, and adequately cater towards the changed circumstances in order to reduce costs for utility companies. These policies were introduced after the first governance responses which focused on subsidizing private investment, stabilizing the local labor market or urban regeneration projects, remained unsuccessful (ibid.). Dascher (2007) highlighted that one fifth of all housing units in East Germany were vacant, accounting to 1,4 Million apartments in total. In Halle(Saale), vacancy rates peaked around the years 2002/2003 and the housing market reached a state of full relaxation (Fliegner and Loebner, 2014), which had to be addressed by policy makers. Therefore, downsizing of the city became the goal, that should be reached through policies for "[…] demolition of unrequired housing, elimination of oversized technical infrastructures, and closures of social infrastructures" (Haase et al., 2014, p. 1528). In particular, housing companies and municipal utility companies were in a crisis, that heightened the risk of bankruptcy. In order to "stabilize" the housing markets in East Germany, demolitions of housing and infrastructures were subsidized by the state to avoid a potential and likely collapse of the housing market. For the whole of East Germany, this meant a demolition of 350.000 housing units (Dascher, 2007). Not only potential bankruptcy of housing companies was feared, but it was also questioned, whether such amounts of vacant units could ever be filled with tenants again. A potential growth scenario seemed unimaginable. Therefore, weighing the costs of maintenance of vacant units and the likely abandonment or vandalization of such vacant spaces against a subsidized demolition, brought forward a clear path. Policy makers and practitioners understood it as a "less is more" (Jurczek and Köppen, 2005, p. 15) approach that was based on a paradigm shift away from growth.

Stadtumbau Ost is an internationally recognized and praised program which has not been replicated in that form anywhere else. It has a standing amongst policy makers. This does not mean that is was accepted throughout. In contrast, many position papers were published that shared a critical view on the concept (see for example Dascher, 2007; Göschel, 2003). Since the driving arguments for the implementation of demolition policies was of economic nature, opinions on the social impact of Stadtumbau Ost did not receive an adequate recognition. Dascher (2007) brings forward the issue of demolitions of housing estates of lower quality that were not fully vacant at that

time. It was common that buildings were still inhabited by some residents, who then were forced to look for another apartment. Other apartments oftentimes were of better quality; however, this could also mean higher rents. Units of the same quality as the demolished one ran the risk of being demolished in time as well. Furthermore, Dascher (2007) highlights the effect of such large scale moving processes, namely, a mobilization of inhabitants who were not directly affected by demolition. Downsizing policies contributed to the tightening of the housing market, which in turn triggered a general rise in rents. Therefore, criticism towards a very one-sided, economic and fiscal view on shrinkage and vacancy that mainly triggered the emergence of Stadtumbau Ost, sounds plausible from a societal and social perspective: "Why is the well-being of landlords in East Germany more important for the German federal state than the well-being of renters in East Germany?" (Dascher, 2007, p. 57). The answer is straight forward, as income from rents was needed to pay off the loans given by the state for modernization of housing units in the 1990s. This prohibited the discussion of alternatives to the program.

Göschel (2003) on the other hand points out the loss of symbolic value through demolition and stresses the significance of place attachment to the living environment. Demolishing built environment and specifically, housing, can go hand in hand with the destruction of memories and reality: "Large-scale demolition carries out the expropriation of lived life." (Göschel, 2003, p. 610) On the other hand however, demolition also allows for new possibilities and the creation of new meaning for the emerging vacant spaces. With a general pessimistic atmosphere in the shrinking cities of East Germany after the reunification, it was rather unlikely that demolition contributed to a positive and future-oriented mindset.

The demolitions in Halle(Saale), as in other shrinking cities that have implemented downsizing policies, took place "from the outside in". Therefore, large housing estates on the outskirts of the city were taken down in the first place. Statistical reports show that in 2003, every fifth apartment in Halle was vacant; For example, the housing estate "Silberhöhe" in the South of the city peaked at a vacancy rate of 42% in the same year (Fliegner and Loebner, 2014). After the implementation of demolition policies, "Silberhöhe" recorded a vacancy rate of 13%. Meanwhile, in inner city districts, every third apartment was vacant. Demolitions however, were not implemented in these neighborhoods, but the vacancy rate shrunk due to revitalization projects and increased demand for housing in such areas (ibid.). After the turn of the century, Halle's inner city became a growing and vital part of the city, while the suburban area experienced an increase of single-family-houses. Prefabricated housing estates continued to record decreasing numbers. The upgrading of inner-city districts boosted the attractiveness of this part of Halle and increased the city's competitiveness with regard to residential location. Fliegner and Loebner (2014) call it the simultaneity of growth and shrinkage that is

representative for many shrinking cities. More importantly, questions arose whether it was reasonable to still implement improvements in neighborhoods that simultaneously contributed to the deterioration or downgrading of other parts and produced “winners and losers” of shrinkage. These developments show that a city-wide strategy to address shrinkage is necessary to avoid segregation between the different neighborhoods.

As a result, various neighborhoods and districts experienced different upgrading processes that were driven by diverse interest groups. For example, in the district Glaucha a so called “ExWoSt” model was implemented. This model developed from the “experimental housing and urban development” federal research program and aimed to support innovative urban planning and policies. It was implemented by the Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Construction (BMWSB), and was supervised by the Federal Institute for Building, Urban and Spatial Research (BBSR) in the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR). Other neighborhoods, such as the prefabricated housing estate “Silberhöhe” was upgraded within the IBA Stadtumbau Sachsen-Anhalt that focused on quality of open spaces after large-scale demolition. In the neighborhood “Freiimfelde” artistic and bottom-up interventions were implemented and contributed to an activation and change of image of an almost forgotten quarter.

## 11.3 A LOOK INTO CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN GERMANY

Civic participation has been mandatory in urban development and urban planning processes since the 1970s. It is regulated by laws that represent the formal framework for public participation (Höcke, 2019). Within the last decades, a trend in Germany has been noticeable: the increasing turn away from representative democracy as a cornerstone of political citizen involvement and an increase of direct participation and active citizenship. Democracy and with that, participation and volunteering, have had its turbulent ups and downs over the centuries. The strong roots of Social Democracy have built and sustained throughout the years and can be regarded as the building block of participation in Germany. The early times after World War II were marked by social and political trust that was reflected in representative democracy, but lower levels of civic activism and direct participation (Evers, 2019). It took many years of needed stability and sense of security before the cultural, societal, social and political conditions were fostered to allow for the emergence of governance and civic engagement. During the late 1960s a period of critical discussion and questioning called “participatory revolution” (Kaase, 1982) emerged. The country’s past was center of the discourse and paved the way to formulate

new objectives and create novel lifestyles, resonating in a widespread atmosphere of change. These changes advanced highly important topics on political agendas, such as rights of minorities and disadvantaged groups. As an important milestone in the history of participation, the term "Bürgerinitiative" ('citizen initiative') (Brand, 2010) entered the discourse. For the first time, groups emerged outside of big political parties or lobbying organizations (Evers, 2019). These interest groups were local and concerned with issues that impacted the quality of life of citizens, such as new planned infrastructures and their ecological impacts or decaying city centers and neighborhoods. This new wave of movements had great impact on the history and tradition of civic involvement. During the 1970s and 1980s it became more obvious that citizen initiatives were becoming a common path to organize yourself in society, question power relations and demand better service delivery from political officers and those in power (ibid.).

These movements were so powerful that they eventually were picked up by the Social Democrats under vice-chancellor Willy Brandt. With the slogan "Mehr Demokratie wagen" ('Dare more democracy') (Brandt, 2001) the goal was formulated to institutionalize a participatory planning concept. With this development the term 'civil society' emerged. Fast forward to the 1990s, "Engagementpolitik" ('engagement politics') emerged. It stems from a special commission on civic engagement that was appointed by the German Parliament and triggered action on the national level such as engagement-related programs or the 2016 "Engagementstrategie" ('engagement strategy') by the Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2016). This strategy has received a fair share of criticism due to it's narrow association with the policy field of social policy and welfare, neglecting the wide arena of engagement that has emerged in the years leading up to the publication (such as environmental movements, engagement and protests with regard to infrastructure projects, or movements and participation addressing migration politics).

In recent years, engagement and participatory engagement processes in various fields have started to expand towards co-productive methods and contributions from citizens (Evers, 2019). Such contributions are relatively new and do not fit the well-known traditional forms of civic action in the form of protests or voluntary actions, but have created a niche on their own. They are local and of experimental nature and therefore contribute to the provision and discourse on quality of life in a different way. However, to this date, although co-production and co-design as a joint practice of citizens and administrations and officials is acknowledged, policies that scale up co-productive forms are still missing. Rather, many programs and public funding programs have emerged that unfortunately are designed for short-term and have specific objectives and goals to be met by participatory actions. Evers (2019) compares these types of strategies and programs to the ones in the Netherlands (do

democracy) and Denmark (program volunteering). Such programs ultimately “activate and restrict volunteering and civic action” (Evers, 2019, p. 49). The major issue with this development is that most interest groups and associations are not able to proceed with any actions or projects as they are very dependent on public funding. They try to creatively exploit the frames of funds and programs for their purpose, and knowingly run the danger of being taken over by a clientelism practices. This is because funding programs are very often designed to constrain any political engagement or action. Therefore, it seems like funding schemes and engagement programs in Germany are more often outlined in a way to aid in achieving the respective ministry’s goals rather than shape responsible civic activists (ibid.).

## 11.4 FREIRAUMGALERIE: FROM ILLEGAL ACTIONS TO GOVERNANCE CHANGES

Revitalization strategies came in different forms and had diverse impacts on different scales. Chapter 11.2 REVITALIZATION EFFORTS IN HALLE(SAALE): DOWNSIZING POLICIES AND STADTUMBAU OST described briefly the “ExWoSt” model, the IBA Stadtumbau Sachsen-Anhalt and bottom-up transformation by “Freiraumgalerie” in the district Freiimfelde. As strategies of neighborhood revitalization and development, the case of Freiraumgalerie stands out as the “odd” but successful approach on various levels. Based on a few analyzed documents that exist on this matter as well as the interviews held with involved actors, this chapter will describe in a chronological order how the project was initiated and what milestones were reached. Further, this chapter will present an actor-network that is a placative basis for the comparative gesture of the two cases. Similarly to chapter 10.4 GEBROOKERBOS: REVITALIZATION 2.0, these results represent step II and III of the analytical framework and will be connected to the theoretical reflections in PART C: THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS.

### *HALLE(SAALE): A STABILIZED SHRINKING CITY?*

Halle(Saale) is one of the most known shrinking cities in East Germany. The legacy of the chemical industry, once the driving sector for the region, started to pass with deindustrialization, which commenced after the reunification of Germany. Since then, Halle experienced a challenging demographic development. Although, the old part of Halle was joined with the industrial part of the chemical industry “Neustadt”, which led to a rise in population, soon, the population decline intensified due to outmigration and unemployment. Since the reunification, the city lost over a third of its population (City Administration_2, 2022), before the numbers started rising in 2009/2010 again, with the rise of immigrants:

*"This (decline) turned in 2010. There was an 'educational immigration' from abroad, and the university was booming. This had a magnetic effect on the old states […] and the universities in the old states were overcrowded, so Halle benefited." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

Still, Leipzig has a pulling effect in the region, and many students settle there after their studies. Additionally, the recent population growth in Halle in 2014/2015 due to the wave of refugees had an effect on the positive numbers:

*"Without the refugee immigration, we would be a shrinking city. That's the difference to Leipzig. They also have a lot of refugee immigration, but they would have been stable without them, at least in the last year. But we would actually be shrinking." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

## *EFFECTS OF SHRINKAGE: VACANCY AND PROFIT MAXIMIZATION*

The revitalization of certain parts of Halle have to be understood in the city-wide context. The city experienced a large north and south expansion and in 2012 still had a vacancy rate of around 25%. Meanwhile the old town, the city center, has been a redevelopment area since 1995. Buildings located there have to be renovated with considerable effort. Still, 60% of buildings were in poor condition and another 15% in very poor condition (City Administration_2, 2022).

On the other hand, the value of the prefabricated buildings in the district Neustadt, has change profoundly and now faces even higher rates of vacancy. Such prefabricated houses are mainly in the areas Silberhöhe, Heide Nord and Südstadt. Further, there are districts, such as "Freiimfelde", in the eastern part of Halle, with rates of 60% residential vacancy. The districts "Freiimfelde", "Glaucha" and "Neustadt" were of particular interest for different kinds of revitalization strategies. Whereas more alternative ways of action have been undertaken in Glaucha, underneath the IBA Sachsen-Anhalt-umbrella, Freiimfelde, a relatively small district gained visibility through bottom-up projects. In Neustadt, however, the vacancy in prefabricated high-rise buildings remains in complex tension between maintaining the legacy of the past, versus maximizing profits by investors. One of the vacant buildings is the new location of the city administration, which has been transferred after a citizen's referendum.:

*"The fraction in the city council that advocated for the preservation of the high-rise buildings, prevailed. Of course, that was not so easy to implement and there was the idea that the administration would move into a building […] The city council had conditions: that the administration presents a concept for the space, the costs, everything. But somehow the administration couldn't do it. We had a somewhat strange mayor who had been suspended for 1,5 years now. An autocrat, with his head against the wall. He started a referendum […]." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

To the surprise of many, the citizens decided with a majority, especially from inner-city areas, for the refurbishing of the buildings. The aversion against the district Neustadt is very prominent in Halle. This is why it is surprising, that inner-city residents voted for the relocation of the administration. Now, they have to travel there, if there is a need. However, the process was not so easy, as the city followed a so called “investor-model”:

*”With the investor model, profits have to remain. You’d think to yourself: the poor city of Halle, why is it suggesting something like this?” (City Administration_1, 2022)*

Figure 29. High-rise prefabricated buildings and the city administration building in Halle Neustadt. Author's own, taken on July 26, 2022.

An investor from Cyprus bought the building and didn’t proceed with any construction for a long time. The need was therefore great, and the mayor could not let this decision sit on his back. Eventually, the Sparkasse bought the building back from the investor, but paid four million Euros more than the investor originally paid (ibid.). The costs for renovation have been saved at very

crucial steps however. There is no air conditioning, no external blinds and no heat insulation in the building.

The future of these high-rise buildings in Neustadt, of which there are four in total, remains open. All of them have found new owners and two are in use. One of them is being renovated, however, it is pretty sure that it will end as a ruin as the owner presented a building concept, which would not function properly and has applied for further subsidies, additionally to the 12 million Euros he had already received. (City Administration_1, 2022) Residents of Neustadt have a different opinion:

*"They just want this eyesore to be gone." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

## *IBA SACHSEN-ANHALT: THE CREATIVE IMPULSE IN GLAUCHA*

Glaucha, a "Gründerzeit"-neighborhood of Halle in the south, has gained a lot of attention through the IBA Sachsen-Anhalt 2010. In total, Halle had seven projects lined up *"like a string of pearls"* (City Administration_1, 2022). Ultimately, what took place in Glaucha, is considered a very successful model, and is based on citizen action from below. The main actor was the Postkult-Association, which under the IBA, had a large experimentation field and lots of room for opportunities.

*"They made a bunch of interventions of artistic nature, set up a free shop, brought the Fete de la Musique to Halle Glaucha, played in many courtyards […] They had a new idea every week […] it was mostly students about to graduate […] They were the hot spot of this youth-subculture, which was on the move in urban development." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

However, those students, who initiated projects in the Postkult-Association, were not Halle-residents. Most of them studied in the city, but did not live in the district of Glaucha. Therefore, a revitalization "from within" or, for "long-term" can be regarded as rather problematic in these circumstances.

One of the most known results of the IBA Sachsen-Anhalt 2010 is the establishment of the so called "Eigentümerstandortgemeinschaften" (ESG). This non-translatable term describes the merger or cooperation between owners of neighboring properties who have a joint objective of maximizing exploitation opportunities and maximization of property value of those properties. It is based on the fact, that many neighborhoods in inner-city districts have faced vacancy and a general weaker market positioning than neighborhoods that have profited from large scale upgrading efforts. In such neighborhoods, many properties belong to individual owners who, beyond modernization efforts on

their property, have not much influence on the entire neighborhood. The underlying idea of ESG is, that owners and landlords of properties work cooperatively on solutions and upgrading activities in neighborhoods that would not be solvable on their own (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2012). Since the value of a property does not only depend on the quality of the property itself, but also the quality and value of the location and neighborhood, quality of the surrounding public space or public transport, these factors can have a great impact. However, alterations or improvements in public space for example cannot be implemented by an individual property owner. ESG therefore sees the opportunity in collaborative efforts of landlords, and other actors, such as associations, redevelopment agencies or housing companies, in a neighborhood to address issues that go beyond one property, but, that have an effect on a neighborhood: "This includes, for example, the negative image of a district, neglected properties in central locations […]. Through an exchange between the property owners and the implementation of coordinated or jointly developed measures, they have noticeably greater power than uncoordinated individual measures." (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2012, p. 7)

ESG essentially introduced a new model of participation and innovative approaches to projects, such as the joint purchase of real estate, coordinated renovations of facades, upgrading through greening actions, use of vacant ground floor zones or the construction of new playgrounds. ESG has gained attention due to its new framing of participation in urban planning. Especially in times of crises and limited public budgets, private engagement is getting increasingly important. Through ESG, traditional forms of participation have been replaced by co-creation (see Bisschops and Beunen, 2019; Bovaird and Loeffler, 2012) (Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung, 2012, p. 12). However, since the model is based on the involvement of private capital in urban planning, much like the well-known concept of Business Improvement districts, it was not supported by society as a whole.

Interestingly, the ESG model ticks off the characteristics of experimental governance (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013): sustainability goals, innovative methods, place-based approaches, co-creation, and empowerment (see chapter 9.3 EXPERIMENTS IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT: EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE OR GOVERNANCE EXPERIMENTATION?), although sustainability goals have to be critically examined, since the introduction of private investment in public tasks and public spaces is very contested and subject to critique, especially regarding sustainability goals that could be overshadowed by profit maximization-goals.

## *URBAN PLANNING IN TIMES OF SHRINKAGE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR BOTTOM-UP ACTION IN FREIIMFELDE*

With the intensity of shrinkage in Halle, it soon became clear, that the city administration had to prioritize the revitalization of certain districts over others. The district Freiimfelde was not high on the priority list, mainly due to its small size of around 2500-3000 residents as well as its location. The area is located on the east side of the railway tracks, which constitute a physical barrier to the city center. On the east side of the district is where the industrial park is located. Additionally, the area is enclosed by main traffic roads which provide an increased amount of traffic noise. A civil servant at the city administration remembers:

> *"[…] at that time, the city administration couldn't pinpoint the perspectives for such a district. Because that always requires that you have a starting point somewhere. And from a planning perspective, it would mean complete restructuring for this area." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

In fact, the 60% of residential vacancy in Freiimfelde in the early 2000s, suffered because many of the owners didn't even recall that they had a property in Halle, or, didn't have any objectives for the future development of them. Many decided to ignore their properties after all. This is where bottom-up and informal action came into play in Freiimfelde. A group of planning students from TU Dortmund came across Halle and the intense vacancy in the district Freiimfelde. Because there were no projections for this quarter, the group decided, under the guidance of Hendryk von Busse, who was writing his diploma thesis about the potentials of art in shrinking cities, to settle in one of the run-down buildings in Freiimfelde and use the "*city as canvas*" (Freiraumgalerie, 2022):

> *"What would happen, if I painted everything, what effects would that have?" (Freiraumgalerie, 2022: 13). The state in which the district was in, can be hardly explained in words: "[…] When they did an analysis of the vacancy, literally parts of buildings were falling down. It was very very desolate […]" (Freiraumgalerie, 2022).*

In the evaluation report of the project "Freiraumgalerie" they group describes it as an urban development project, that has the aim to transform a neglected and vacant neighborhood to a urban platform for culture and education (Freiraumgalerie, 2015). The lacking opportunities for participation were filled with painting the unused or underused spaces, forming the cultural identity and vitality of the city and fostering the idea of collaborative urban development. But it was not only the physical infrastructure that was concerning:

> *"Back then it was much worse, because the buildings were not empty and maybe it sounds weird, but the atmosphere was more depressing and scary. Because in these broken buildings .. there were people living who were also broken." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

The group of students called themselves “Open Space Gallery” (Freiraumgalerie) and started doing. One of the first interventions was the installment of an “all you can paint festival” after getting to know the area, the residents, the creatives, the students and various associations in the district. In total, three of such festivals took place in the area. They brought attention to the district, they also brought people to the district (from Halle as well as from abroad), they gave potential to creatives and artists.


Figure 30. Examples of murals and urban art in Freiimfelde. Source: stadtmacher-archiv. de (acccessed on Dec. 4, 2023)

The Freiraumgalerie was even awarded the “Preis Soziale Stadt” for their involvement in Freiimfelde, quite early on already, which is seen as a success. Informality was the way to go, because no one cared about Freiimfelde anyways. A civil servant remembers:

*“The first two festivals […] took place with toleration, because that was of course also an intended paradigm shift. […] There were big skeptics. It really helped that Freiimfelde didn’t have great ideas as to what else could be done there.” (City Administration_2, 2022)*

The interventions that took place in Freiimfelde were considered rather extreme, however, this it was also good that they happened exactly there:

*“[…] he (Hendryk von Busse) had this approach, in this extreme constellation, so to speak, and it was good that it was a very small quarter, because this artistic impulse was much more effective here.*

*In a larger neighborhood it would certainly have gotten a bit lost. There would have been much more constraints. So it was tabula rasa, so to speak." (City administration_1, 2022)*

The beginnings of Freiraumgalerie were very informal, two men and two women, students who had each their own interests and perspectives for the district. "[…] the men were like 'let's paint everything' and 'awesome'!" (Freiraumgalerie, 2022) while the female members tried to understand the city as the setting for a change of paradigms, and were very interested in situationist approaches and looking beyond the art interventions. The reason for choosing Halle for their interventions was more random than strategic:

*"We never wanted to go there to help the area..that wasn't Hendryk's position. It was more an experiment […] the place was predestined for it." (Freiraumgalerie, 2022).*

The core of the work of Freiraumgalerie lies in painting facades in Freiimfelde by themselves. This is how their involvement in the area started, before they proceeded with festivals and finally becoming an institutionalized actor in urban development. However, painting the facades in the district wasn't as easy as it sounds in the beginning. Due to the state in which some of the buildings were, the students first had to lay the foundation for their work. This meant refurbishing of the façade and mortaring. (Freiraumgalerie, 2022) Hence, the upgrading of Freiimfelde was not only an artistic intervention, but also of physical nature by the Freiraumgalerie.

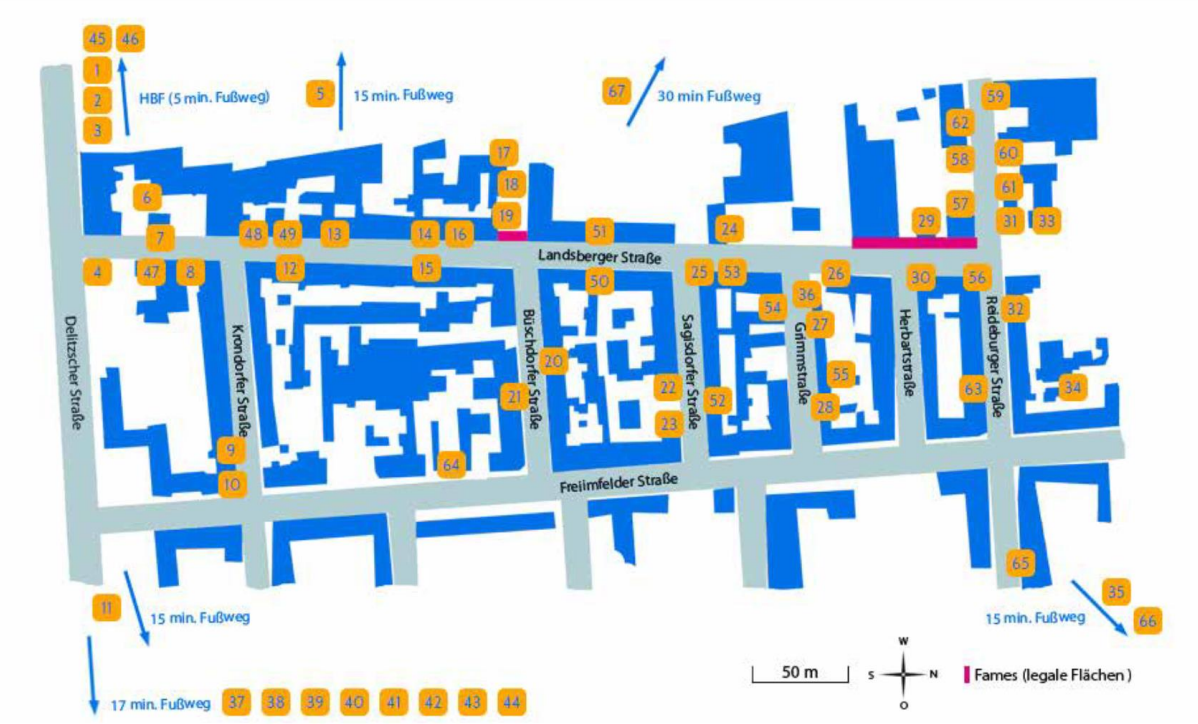


Figure 31. Locations of murals sand urban art in the neighborhood Freiimfelde in the years 2012-2014. Source: Evaluation report Freiraumgalerie (2015,p.12)

At the end of 2011 the Freiraumgalerie initiated an event together with a social institution to gather local actors and get to know the network a bit more. Property owners and students as well as creatives took part who all had an interest in the district:

*"The neighborhood had become a bit livelier, but also the drugs and prostitution and the big raids.. […] but the neighborhood had still not found a new identity. The owners had an interest that we paint their facades – perfect. […] 'we paint your façade, you provide us with some material' […] But they did not have a say in the murals, especially not if we did it for free. With commissioned work, you can co-decide, if not commissioned, then artistic freedom. This is how we development a great network of painters, art students, owners.." (Freiraumgalerie, 2022)*

The Freiraumgalerie-approach has not been novel in neighborhood upgrading strategies. Graffiti, Street Art, cultural and creative approaches to urban redevelopment have been on the agenda for some decades now (Liebmann and Robischon, 2003; Matyushkina, 2021, 2023) and particularly on the rise as promising approach to postindustrial urban development. In line with many small-scale projects in Germany, specifically in Berlin, the plethora of vacant space and underused, deteriorating buildings, Freiraumgalerie applied a very creative approach to an area that was forgotten by the municipality, or at least, not planned for. Specifically in Germany, creative-city approaches such as temporary use or so-called "makeshift" approaches have been playing a significant role since the turn of the century (see Oswalt, 2005; Oswalt et al., 2013; Ziehl et al., 2012). They have evolved from a very bottom-up form of experimentation to a strategy implemented by city officials and used for creative marketing policies (Colomb, 2012). This transformation of rather informal tactics and actions has experienced large scale critique for instrumentalizing such initiatives (Novy and Colomb, 2013).

## *FREIRAUMFALERIE AND CIVIC INVOLVEMENT*

The work of Freiraumgalerie did not stop at "only" painting murals. One of the successful collaborations with the city administration took place in the form of a neighborhood concept developed with citizens of the neighborhood. The actors of Freiimfelde decided in 2014 that they wanted to get active by themselves, after they came together in 2012:

*"'If the city won't do it, then we'll do it.' And the city administration was happy to support that." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

On the formal level, the neighborhood concept was a result of the ISEK process, where the topic of creative urban planning came up:

*"The city council requested a creative concept for the development of Freiimfelde. I think it was by the Linke. And then the administration has an assignment. […] It's one of those assignments where everyone says 'yes, great!' […] Together with the Freiraumgalerie we then started with drawing up the process for developing this neighborhood concept with citizens." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

The city administration played only a mediating and communicative role and did not intervene from the perspective as city planning office. Freiraumgalerie took over the content creation of this concept and organized workshops and implemented participatory methods to get residents involved. Their roles were different, because Freiraumgalerie had a special bond and connection to the tenants in this neighborhood, which was worth a lot. They were known through the festivals, and accepted by the community. This neighborhood concept for Freiimfelde has won a prize as well.

Figure 32. Mural painted by the inhabitants of the building. Source: Evaluation report Freiraumgalerie (2015, p. 36)

Because the neighborhood concept was a request by the city council, the actors of Freiraumgalerie were paid for this job:

*"Of course, they received little money. For us, it was like a test. We paid less than we would have paid a consulting company for a concept. The alternative methods were important for us and to see what we can achieve with them." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

What made the concept stand out and why it was perceived positively is partly due to the Freiraumgalerie's way of portraying the content. City council members were very surprised about the visualizations and needed to get used to the style first. Citizen participation therefore was taken to a different level through the involvement of Freiraumgalerie. They mastered their art in an excellent way and used it to communicate urban planning matters in a visually pleasing way, and that was worth a lot to citizens and helped them understand the topic. Due to the Freiraumgelerie's actions and murals, they were known very well in the neighborhood. This made interactions with citizens much easier. However, when the students started their interventions in Freiimfelde, it was never a goal to increase civic participation in the neighborhood:

*"…to realize that they can do something themselves. […] Not necessarily this formal planning. That would not have been our intention. But to realize, oh, I can help shape my environment, I can formulate ideas and these ideas can also find their space." (Freiraumgalerie, 2022)*

## *THE ROLE OF THE CITY ADIMINSTRATION: TURNING A BLIND EXE AND PERSONAL INTEREST*

*„[…] one of the most beautiful projects that I will ever do in my whole life. That also includes the future. Super nice people, I have had so many great experiences there. […] yet it is not about the fact that I thought it was great; that they thought it was great. But that in the end, it worked for the first few years without city administration. And I don't think you should ever lose sight of that." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

The role of the city administration in Freiimfelde is multifaceted. Firstly, by "neglecting" the neighborhood and not putting forward a formal concept, had a positive effect on the emergence of bottom-up projects. More or less, you were able to do anything without worrying about getting attention from the city administration. (City Administration_1, 2022) It was clear, that Freiimfelde would always remain a

*"special neighborhood […] due to all the restrictions from the surroundings. […] it will never be a good functioning 'Gründerzeitquartier' in the normal sense." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

Hence, when the group Freiraumgalerie appeared and started implemented their interventions, the city administration did not intervene in the first place. It was more a wait-and-see mentality that the city adopted. Even when architectural monuments were painted over during the all you can paint-festivals, the city did not intervene by calling the historic preservation authority. After the success – the attention, the liveliness etc. – became apparent, the city started to support the Freiraumgalerie and their interventions, with funding from the cultural sector.

Secondly, personal interest from the city administration was crucial. In fact, the civil servant, who ended up working on the neighborhood concept for Freiimfelde with the Freiraumgalerie, became aware of the group through one of the all you can paint-festivals:

*"[…] it was simply a cool event, so you just went there. It was another thing that you can't necessarily plan, it was a coincidence. I had my first apartment there at the corner. I lived in one of the houses until our son was born. […] So, I had a personal interest that made it easier to go to that festival. […] At some point I talked to Hendryk at an event there. He asked me if I could find out the owners of some properties. Of course, I couldn't just give him the names, you can't do that. But as city administration I could call or write them. And then we started to make it more and more official.." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

However, working with such informal initiatives is always a matter of time-management and the head of the department's attitude towards them:

*"Because our head of the department supports such approaches. That's important, because if they don't do that, we don't really have a chance. […]" (City Administration_1, 2022)*

Time-wise, the shortage of staff was highlighted as a challenge, because even if there is interest in collaborating with informal groups, the formal tasks that they have to do as an administration needs to be done as well. Sometimes, they even have to invest their free time:

"*[…] it wasn't rare, actually. Then there was some appointment at 8p.m., which of course wasn't working time, or if there is something on the weekend, that's of course not working time either. […] But the willingness must be there.." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

However, as the Freiraumgalerie highlights, there was a certain helplessness of the city administration that accelerated the students' involvement in times of shrinkage:

*"But what I found a bit critical and struggled with myself … it's totally cool that we were able to do all that. But it also shows the helplessness of the city itself. I really thought for a long time if what we were doing – was it democratic legitimacy? It is.. but it's still a strange thing, because we have been given a lot of power. We were students […] who had the right to paint an entire neighborhood […] the population was not asked beforehand." (Freiraumgalerie, 2022)*

## *ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS: ANCHOR PROJECTS AND WIN-WIN CONSTELLATIONS*

The success of a lot of the projects, led by the Freiraumgalerie, needs to be considered within the specific context and situational embeddedness. Their involvement in the district Glaucha was partially made possible by the IBA Glaucha, which was taking place at the same time. Similarly, the Freiraumgalerie was active in the district Neustadt, during the Zukunftsstadt program. This constellation put forward important conditions for fostering the momentum of the Freiraumgalerie:

*"[…]you always need some context, where the administration is also under pressure to succeed […]. In the case of Glaucha, this was the IBA […] we virtually swam along with the big anchor of the IBA. And then we were a figurehead […]." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

What is more, not only the context of having an umbrella project where smaller initiatives can dock and to some extent profit from the circumstances, funding and attention, but it is the speed of administrative working within such big arrangements:

*"This is not possible in regular city administration mode. […] The official channels are too long; young people can no longer stand it when we say yes, we'll build something in three years. I, or rather the young people, will no longer be in Halle then." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

However, as the city administration also highlights, anchor projects do not have to be an absolute necessity:

*"It is important to create civil society actions, completely without administration and also to proceed completely off the existing legal paths. […] There are many things that are allowed […] the thing is that we've all just got used to the fact that you always ask for permission […] I would sometimes like to see a bit more courage there, too." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

Another element for successful bottom-up projects is mutual interest and benefit, as was prominent in the Neustadt district. Otherwise, the additional work for civil servants outweighs the gain for the city administration. "[…]the Freiraumgalerie was interested in Neustadt […] they had an interest in these huge walls that exist in Neustadt. And there was a win-win constellation again. We had a project where you could do innovative things – Zukunftsstadt. […]. They designed several walls here and Zukunftsstadt also partly financed them, which is of course always the deal." (City Administration_1, 2022) Such a win-win constellation is made official by city council decision:

*"There is a contribution on citizen engagement and creative urban development in our urban development concept, which has been adopted by the city council. And that is the basis for us to say,*

*okay, we have this city council decision […] on this basis we can work together with such actors if there is a mutual benefit." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

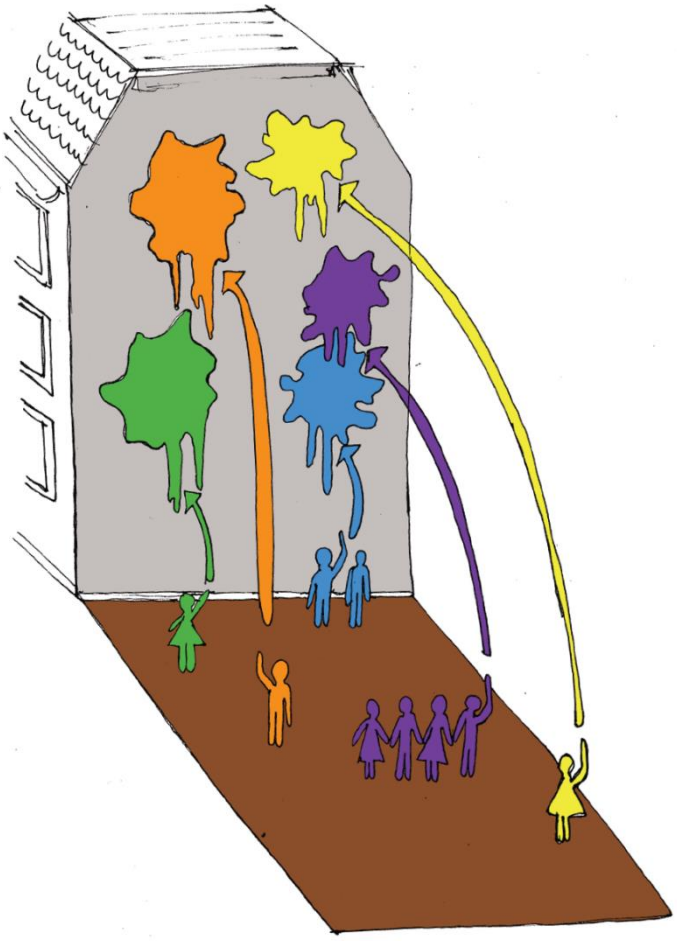

Figure 33. Introducing Urban Art as collaborative practice through painting as novel forms of participation in neglected neighborhoods. Source: Evaluation report Freiraumgalerie (2015, p.24)

## *THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHED NETWORKS AND NETWORKING*

An interesting fact about the success of the Freiraumgalerie in Halle is that the founding members were not from the city, but came from Dortmund. They did not have established networks in the Halle, nor a positioning within the informal network. However, Hendryk von Busse did manage to settle quickly in Halle and establish necessary networks with informal and formal institutions:

*"The fact that Hendryk came to Halle from the outside was a real godsend for both, I think. […] there is an atmosphere in Halle that not everyone likes. […] But for some people, it triggers this boost of creativity. And I think Hendryk immediately felt very much at home here in Halle, even though he didn't know it before." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

This resulted in relatively quickly establishing contacts to the former mayor, who backed up the Freiraumgalerie immensely:

*"If we hadn't had the mayor's support, it probably wouldn't have worked so well. In her last years in office […] people thought, oh well, let's do it before we go." (Freiraumgalerie, 2022)*

However, one of the main actors who was responsible for the quick integration of the students, was the long established Postkultverein (Association for creative and cultural interventions in urban space). They acted as the umbrella association and the Freiraumgalerie could subordinate within their network. The Postkultverein themselves acted as partner in urban development projects, such as IBA Glaucha and installed cultural activities:

*"They started under the umbrella of the Postkultverein and had an easy start; they had association-status and could start as a project without having to deal with all these structures." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

Eventually, the Freiraumgalerie emancipated from the Postkultverein and became their own, even stronger association. Additionally, the city administration highlights the need for informal networking for citizens, as many issues can be resolved by talking to each other. They installed several platforms for exchanging tools, party equipment such as beer tents, vans and so on.

## *THE DEFINITION OF "SUCCESS" IN FREIIMFELDE*

The Freiraumgalerie's actions are described as major success in Halle. The neighborhood Freiimfelde, where the students started their involvement, is experiencing an influx of residents. Simultaneously, rent prices have increased on average 2 Euros per square meter (Freiraumgalerie, 2022). Often, the discussion around gentrification arises, as the numbers can point to such a process. However, all interview partners highlight, that in Freiimfelde the topic of gentrification must be sensitized to the local circumstances at that time:

*"Upgrading had to happen. There it had to happen. It was desolate. When buildings fall onto the street, then we are not talking about..well gentrification is then still far away." (Freiraumgalerie, 2022)*

Residents of the neighborhood Freiimfelde had to gain quality of life back first, which is why some degree of upgrading was necessary. The vacancy in the neighborhood was around 50%, which is why displacement was not really the case. More so, the huge vacancy led to a relaxed housing market. However, the city administration was aware that conflicts of interest may arise:

*"[…] those who still live here are the socially weak. They are also the ones who can't defend themselves well. That's the point, that of course you have a certain young cultural elite that comes in from the outside and then they meet the older residents." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

Nevertheless, "success" is in the eye of the beholder more or less. Physically, there have been upgradings here and there, and with this process also many of the murals by the Freiraumgalerie have disappeared. A civil servant explains:

*"[…] the apartments that have since been reoccupied, have not necessarily all been rented to Hartz IV recipients or to people who receive social benefits. In this respect, there has been a change, which, if you look at the statistical figures, has not had this resounding effect […] not at all. So still, the tendency is rather precarious." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

Interestingly, there are accusations, that all the interventions and support that went into Freiimfelde, did not pay off, especially regarding the social figures of the neighborhood. The civil servant explains an important factor why this is the case:

*"I always have to say – yes, because within five years in urban development, the social data change has rarely anything to do with the people who have been living there. That has to be said quite honestly. People who have spent years in long-term unemployment, in precarious living conditions with all that it entails – from child poverty to alcoholism – they will not now suddenly become the entrepreneurs of our society just because of a park project or a colorful wall. This is important in my opinion." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

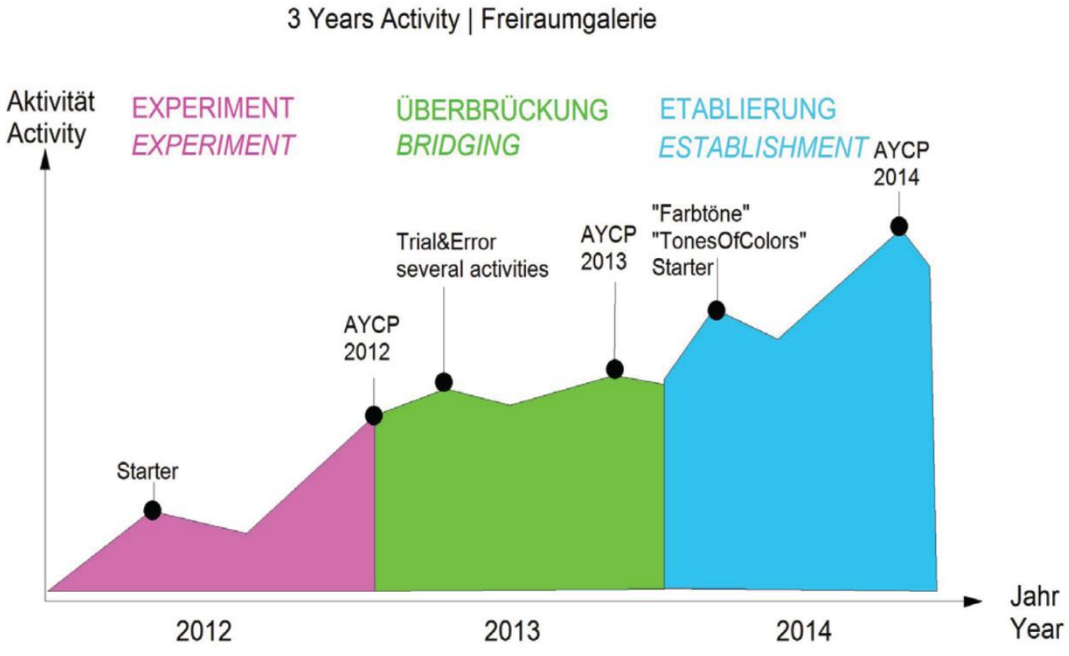


Figure 34. A reflection of the evolution and institutionalization of Freiraumgalerie in the years 2012-2014. Source: Evaluation report Freiraumgalerie (2015, p. 18)

## *LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVES AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF FREIRAUMGALERIE*

The jump from informal actions to formal partner in urban development project of the Freiraumgalerie happened rather fast, as Figure 34 shows. Due to their integration within the Postkultverein-network, their status as association and therefore partial formalization picked up (Freiraumgalerie, 2022). The fact, that the founding members were students of urban planning, and therefore had expertise in urban development to some degree, was not a factor that particularly contributed to the following collaborations. The institutionalization of the Freiraumgalerie had long-term and broader effects, that go beyond them. Bottom-up initiatives are being met in a more open manner than before, however, financial support is always a big question mark:

*"[…] we don't always manage to get them to a permanent basis. It's often that we only take care of it when we have time for it. And then we have to come up with something, how to finance certain things.." (City Administration_1, 2022)*

Additionally, the city administration realized the need and importance for offering space for civic initiatives. They installed the so called "Freiraumbüro", an office, which was the result from a collaboration with another bottom-up initiative. More so, this office is not directly affiliated with the city administration, but acts as a broker between the city and the residents.

## *RIGHT TIME AND RIGHT PLACE: USING THE MOMENTUM*

The involvement of the Freiraumgalerie in Halle took place in very turbulent times where any action would have been appreciated. There was a certain helplessness of the city administration that paired with the pessimistic mood of the citizens, and ended up creating a very negative atmosphere in Halle. A civil servant reflects:

*"[…] to be at the right place at the right time .. I believe that cities have atmospheres and they trigger emotions. […] It was certainly luck that it ended up being Halle. But I believe that regardless of the fact that Hendryk was the motor and got a thing rolling that would not have been possible in this size and complexity without him […] other paths would have opened up. It was also a time.. where people started to deal with the shrinkage a bit constructively and also actively; also a bit aggressively." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

The time of the Freiraumgalerie's involvement fell onto fertile ground. It was a time where action was wanted, also from the city administration's side. At that time, the city had started the

ISEK 2025 process, which at its core, worked around the question of the future of Halle. It all worked nicely together, but nevertheless it was also luck that the actors came together at that time:

*"Everything really did fit. That was at a time when the city administration was well aware that we had to do something, but we didn't know what. And a time when young active people shifted their commitment and their activity there." (City Administration_2, 2022)*

Although the Freiraumgalerie is being celebrated for their creative and individual way of working in Halle, at that time, the circumstances would have probably birthed another association that became active: *"Something similar would have definitely existed in a comparable way."* (City Administration_2, 2022)

## 11.5 ACTORS, MOTIVATIONS AND RELATIONS

In line with chapter 10.5 ACTORS, MOTIVATIONS AND RELATIONS in the case of Heerlen, Netherlands, this section will investigate the role of the government and other actors in the context of Halle(Saale), Germany. The role of governments in civic initiatives becomes very apparent in the latter case. Reflecting the constellations against the context of shrinkage in Halle(Saale) and the progressing institutionalization of Freiraumgalerie, or, the institutionalization of creative and cultural approaches in postindustrial urban development, provides an understanding of how quickly and to what extent changes to local governance are possible. Further, the critical state of governance in shrinking cities becomes apparent through discussion of the level of freedom given to Freiraumgalerie. Certainly, the development and evolution of this informal and bottom-up group stands out as frontrunner in novel forms of experimental governance and civic action, due to the drastic devolution of tasks to those and allocation of responsibilities for the neighborhood Freiimfelde see (Pill, 2022; Klein et al., 2017). This in turn produced a rethinking of actor's roles within the governance of the neighborhood.

The actors involved in the process of Freiraumgalerie becoming an institutionalized partner in urban development and planning can be divided into "initiators", "facilitators" and "participants" as well as grouped into "directly" and "indirectly" involved actors. As directly involved actor, only Freiraumgalerie as "initiator" is defined, whereas indirectly involved actors are made up of citizens of the neighborhood Freiimfelde, so called "participants". The third group, "facilitators" consists of the municipality, the Postkultverein and IBA Glaucha/Sachsen-Anhalt (see Figure 35). Thus, the Freiraumgalerie-case exemplifies a very bottom-up case that is led by organized civil society actors, who managed to conduct a very experimental project. Although their actions were very informal and borderline illegal at various stages, the support of the municipality was a crucial factor in the process

of institutionalization of the group. On the other hand, however, the desperation of the municipality is a contributing factor to the institutionalization of Freiraumgalerie through the devolution of important tasks. The long-term neglect of the neighborhood Freiimfelde and missing perspective or vision for the future was picked up by Freiraumgalerie and turned into a laboratory for experimentation, chiefly in the form of upgrading, painting and participatory actions. Following this, investors re-gained interest in this neighborhood and triggered an even bigger wave of renovations. In return, no (external) funding through the “Städtebauförderung” (engl. Urban development funding scheme) was necessary. The municipality even stated to extent the creative approach to other neighborhoods, because of this success (Fliegner and Loebner, 2014).

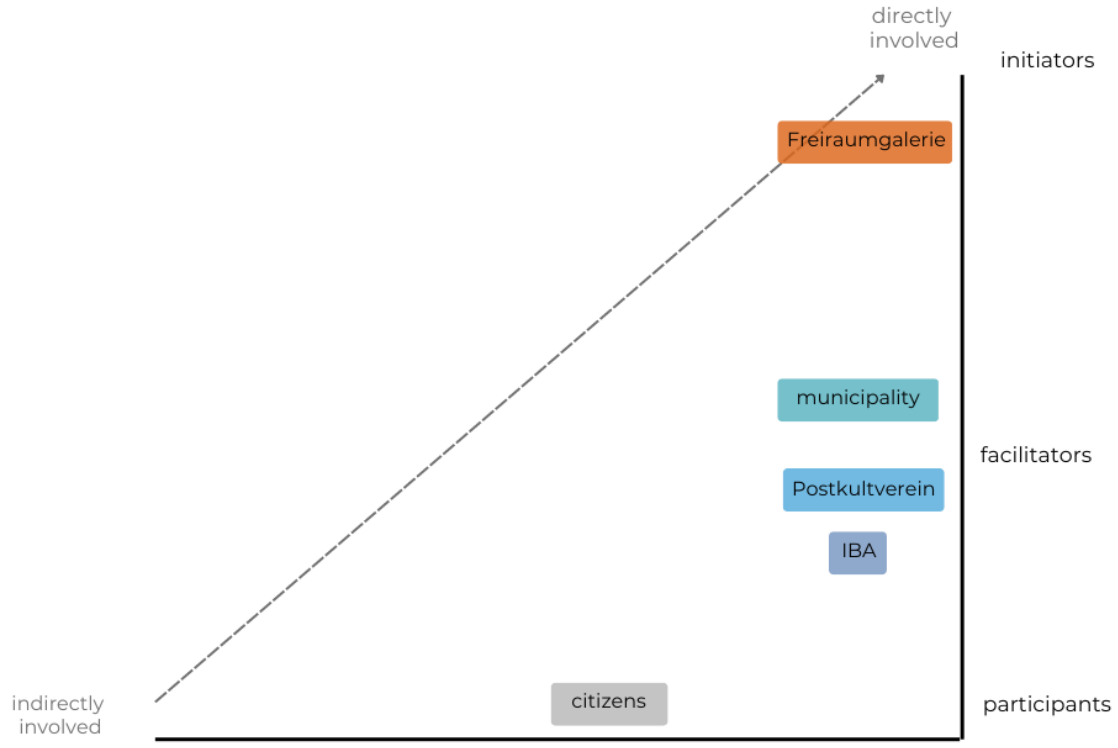


Figure 35. Actors and Involvement in the institutionalization of Freiraumgalerie. Author's own.

The actor network in the Freiraumgalerie-case is significantly shaped by personal connections and individual interest in the matter, as it was documented in the previous chapter. Historical events, mainly drastic consequences of shrinkage in the field of housing and quality of life have triggered wicked societal challenges in Halle(Saale), for which the solution goes beyond planning processes. The city administration talked about a depressive and scary state, in which the neighborhood was in, as well as broken people, who were lacking much more than a traditional, top-down revitalization project

could fill. Freiraumgalerie found a way to fill the neighborhood with life through experimental actions and imagination for Freiimfelde, but never with the purpose of helping the neighborhood. This unintentional aspect is an important factor in the composition of the entire case.

By design, experimental actions are temporary (Sengers et al., 2021; Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren, 2018). This was the intention of Freiraumgalerie in the beginning, too. The results of the interviews indicate that the personal relations and understanding between the municipality and the group have significantly contributed to the further collaboration and longevity of the actions. While the Postkultverein served as a stepping stone for the student group to start their action within an organized framework, the IBA umbrella served as an accelerating incubator for carrying out administrative tasks much quicker. This played out very well with the idea of Freiraumgalerie, that was of experimental and temporary nature and might not have been as successful without it. The passive involvement of the municipality in the beginning stages by “turning a blind eye” or pretending to not see some of the illegal activities, made them an attractive partner for Freiraumgalerie for reaching their goals. The distinct municipal role in this case therefore, is fundamental. When talking about “the municipality” or “the city administration”, I specifically refer to a handful of civil servants who at that time had leading positions within the administration. During the interviews they referred to some of the group members of Freiraumgalerie by name, which shows how close the relation was at that time, and in some projects still is. Figure 36 below illustrates the discussed findings in a visual representation. It portrays the actors and the type of relation between them as well as their motivations. The motivation of the actor Postkultverein has been left out, as the information in this case is scarce.

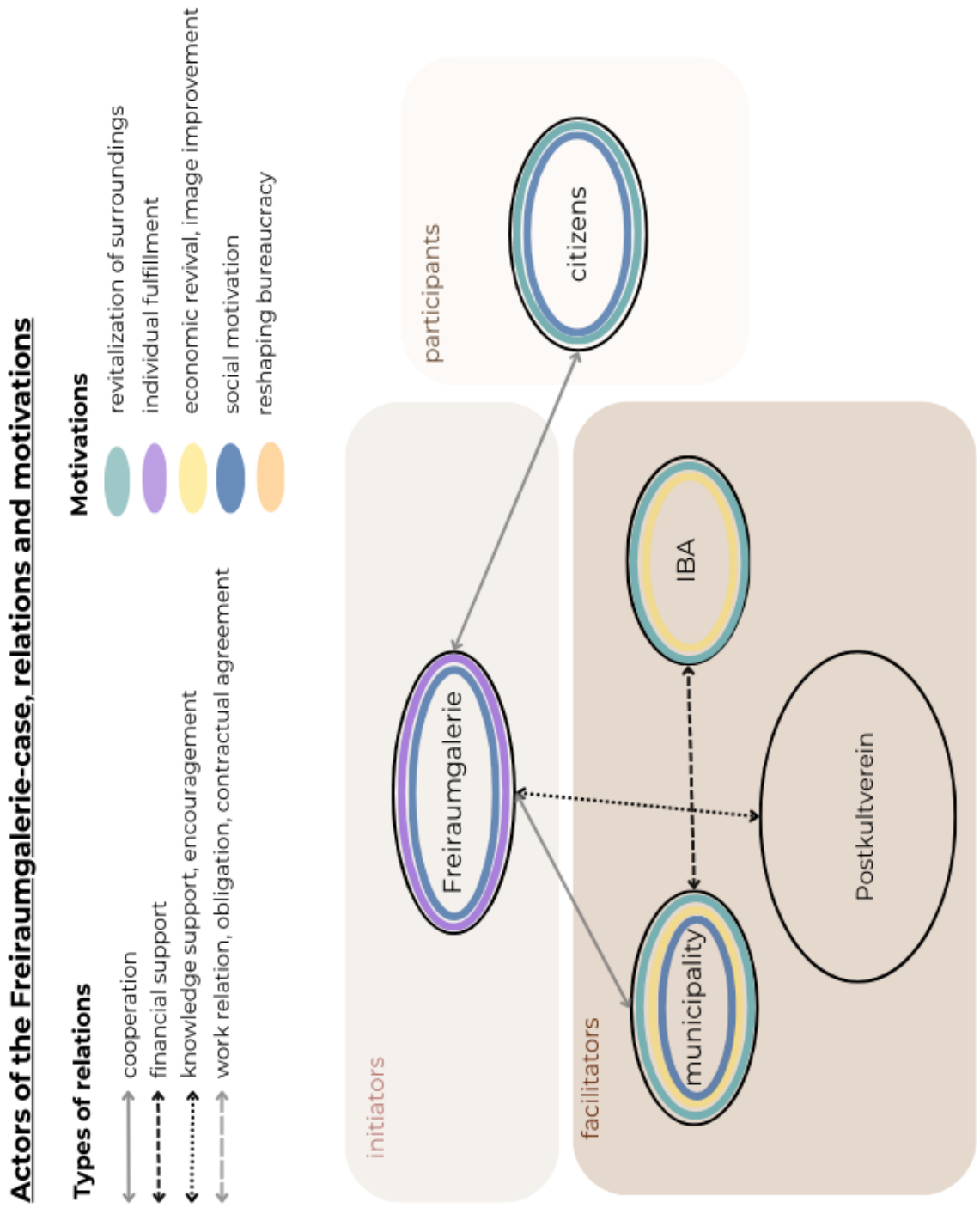


Figure 36. Actors of the Freiraumgalerie-case, relations and motivations. Author's own.

## *THE FREIRAUMGALERIE-CASE AND 'CITIZEN CONTROL'*

While in Arnstein's participation ladder, as presented in Figure 9, p. 64, the highest form of participation, called 'citizen control, portrays a heavily romanticized form of governing, the Freiraumgalerie-case suggests its possibility. The results presented in the previous chapter are a clear representation of some of the highest levels of participation, according to Arnstein (1969), with prominent levels of trust as enabling factor. Freiraumgalerie's experience resembles a blank canvas that was handed over without many obstacles. The freedom to conduct various creative and sometimes illegal actions of that size is unique in neighborhood development in the Global North. However, the circumstances of shrinkage, long-term desperation and lack of resources in the municipality, are equally as unique. The findings of this case confirm, that these factors are chiefly relevant for the 'success' of Freiraumgalerie, the presented process and long-term outcomes. The municipality talks about 'letting go' and handing over the development of any vision for the neighborhood Freiimfelde to the association Freiraumgalerie early on in the process. While Freiraumgalerie didn't want this responsibility in the beginning, they have unintentionally become the strategic innovators and developers of the neighborhood. With this decision, the municipality has let go – or had to let go - of 'traditional' forms of participation and did not intervene in how Freiraumgalerie was approaching their projects. There was not much convincing needed for this decision, and the results give the impression the association stepping in at that point in the history of the city was a gift rather than a challenge for the municipality.

The various stages in the timeline of the Freiraumgalerie-case therefore become very blurred. The following chapter THE FREIRAUMGALERIE-CASE IN A TIMELINE: PHASES AND SCALES refers to these conclusions and visualizes the involvement of the municipal government throughout the process.

## *THE FREIRAUMGALERIE-CASE IN A TIMELINE: PHASES AND SCALES*

In the case of Freiraumgalerie, the role of the municipal government changes throughout the process several times. It never leaves the scope of a facilitating and stimulating actor and does not climb the ladder towards a controlling or manipulating role. The Freiraumgalerie-case in a timeline presents a very bottom-up approach that has been treated and supported as such. The reasons for this, as mentioned beforehand heavily rely on the critical circumstances brought forward by shrinkage and population loss. Figure 37 divides the process of creation of the association until its institutionalization into six stages. At the same time, the figure localizes the stages on a scale from micro-level to city-level and defines the role of the government in the various stages. Evidently, the Freiraumgalerie-case is a true bottom-up case, initiated in its entirety by civil society actors, who at the time were students interested in painting a run-down neighborhood as a canvas.

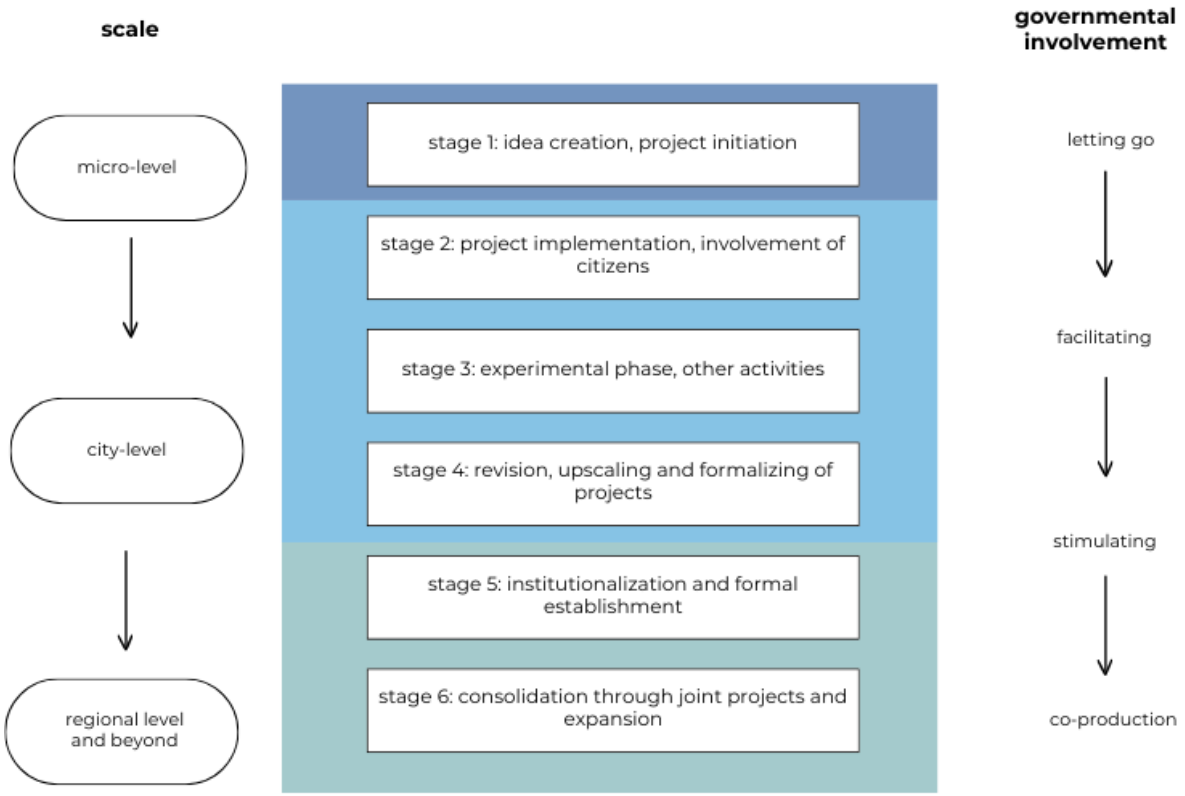


Figure 37. The Freiraumgalerie-case in a timeline. Author's own.

The process starts on the micro-level, the Freiimfelde neighborhood and is shaped by the association. While the municipal government knows about some of the informal and illegal actions and missing permits for the implementation of events, they knowingly and actively let go of any formal involvement. The case develops, as the association receives positive feedback on their actions and

without any urban development plan for the neighborhood, the municipal government starts facilitating projects and more experimental approaches led by Freiraumgalerie. Eventually, the group has gained experience in civic involvement and on the ground neighborhood development, that they become a valuably and knowledgeable partner for the municipal government. This is accelerated by a stimulating role of the municipality, who contribute to a formalization of the group and their projects by evaluating their actions. Eventually, Freiraumgalerie acquires project after project, which makes them stand out as actor in urban development even on the regional scale. The institutionalization and consolidation of the association therefore takes place due to their expertise and development of different forms of participatory methods. The municipal government ultimately becomes an actor for co-producing and co-creating that acknowledges Freiraumgalerie as partner in urban development at eye level.

## 11.6 FREIRAUMGALERIE AND EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE: AN EXAMPLE OF INVENTED SPACES OF PARTICIPATION?

The findings presented in the preceding chapters indicate two main conclusions related to municipal capacity within experimental governance in times of shrinkage, and the devolution of tasks to citizens during shrinkage.

First, the analysis of the actors within the Freiraumgalerie-case shows a very heterogeneous picture. Students, who found themselves in an experimental phase and wanted to try out an approach in a shrinking city, versus city officials working in the municipal government. They came together in a network by chance and continued a collaborative relationship because of high interest, personal belief in the actions taken and a serious need for agency. Due to the municipalities' critical state, Freiraumgalerie was given freedom for action in the first phases of the process – a quasi laissez-faire approach. A co-creative approach can be identified in a later stage, when municipal actors and Freiraumgalerie join forces. However, the analysis found that at this stage, Freiraumgalerie has had conducted several projects on their own, and have moved on towards a formal institutionalization of the group, rather than being an unorganized group of citizens. Therefore, it can be questioned whether at this stage, the actors have moved on to a professional work-relation, rather than trying to carve out a collaborative framework between citizens and governmental actors.

Second, the analysis of the processual view shows clearly that municipal capacity for organizing a co-creative and experimental approach in a shrinking city like Halle(Saale), was not given at that point.

The critical moment in the shrinkage-process have simply not allowed for an undertaking like this. Critical financial and human resources, the devastating state of the neighborhood Freiimfelde that was lacking a formal vision, have prohibited any additional action by the municipal government. Therefore, a close look at whether Freiraumgalerie have been overburdened with responsibility to shape the future of the neighborhood is necessary. These findings highlight the immense lack of municipal capacity in times of shrinkage and further, question democratic accountability.

These two main findings are further elaborated in the following sections.

## *LOOKING FOR CO-CREATION: A LAISSEZ-FAIRE APPROACH AND EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE*

The specific role of the municipality in the Freiraumgalerie-case is particular. While in the majority of urban experimentation projects, municipal governments are either a partner or facilitator (Bulkeley et al., 2016; Eneqvist et al., 2022; Castán Broto and Bulkeley, 2013; Kronsell and Mukhtar-Landgren, 2018; Sørensen et al., 2021), the procedural analysis of the German case "Freiraumgalerie" indicates a rather invisible role in the beginning stages. This "invisibility" has two main indications: first, by avoiding involvement within the process the municipality knowingly facilitated a truly bottom-up process led by Freiraumgalerie; second, by not getting involved, the municipal government protected their capacity and did not engage with an informal action in a neighborhood that was nonetheless off the radar for concrete planning. Freiraumgalerie did not approach the municipality formally, as they wanted to experiment and felt that the neighborhood wasn't cared for in the first place. However, a fear of cooptation could also have played a part (Frantzeskaki and Rok, 2018). Ultimately, Freiraumgalerie did fulfill administrative goals, by creating the missing vision for the neighborhood and gave inhabitants a sense of belonging to the forgotten area of Halle(Saale) again. As Dinnie and Holstead (2018) highlight, this can be a set back in successful collaborations in multi-actor networks. Additionally, trust of civil society in local governments tends to be weak in shrinking contexts, according to Ročak (2019). The actions taken by Freiraumgalerie can therefore be categorized as active citizenship that during the process and with time triggered a way to eliminate such trust issues.

Therefore, the quasi laissez-faire approach chosen by the municipal government in the beginning stages of the project activated a process towards experimental governance that potentially would not have turned out as successful. By playing the role of the "hidden" partner and facilitator, they opened up the opportunity for Freiraumgalerie to fill an existing and pressing void in the neighborhood Freiimfelde. This void could not have been filled by an official actor, such as the municipal government.

Additionally, the new social relations that were established between citizens, Freiraumgalerie and the municipality, have played a fundamental part in the development of the neighborhood as well as the institutionalization of Freiraumgalerie at a later stage. While Frantzeskaki et al. (2016) stress that civil society oftentimes can be actively pushed into the shadows while still fulfilling administrative purposes, in the German case of Freiraumgalerie, the municipal government has actively pulled themselves to the background with the purpose of giving freedom to expand informal and illegal actions.

## *STRUCTURAL CHANGES – INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF INFORMAL ORGANIZATIONS*

The actual and long-lasting effects of experimental projects are one of the most important characteristics of them. Particularly, structural changes for example in the governance of urban areas can be an indication of the shift away from "projectification" (Torrens and Wirth, 2021). The German case "Freiraumgalerie" indeed achieves the implementation of some major changes. For the most part, they concern the institutionalization of the informal organization Freiraumgalerie as actor and partner in urban development through prominent projects and collaborations with official actors such as the municipal government. This evolution can be questioned, particularly with regard to a critical understanding of time-sensitive actions, however through the lens of experimental governance, the institutionalization of Freiraumgalerie ensured a stability of the organization and therefore transformative capacity that shaped the neighborhood decisively. These findings indicate that a mix of flexible and stable relations between actors within urban experimentation can be beneficial. This is in line with the results presented by Bergvall-Kåreborn and Ståhlbröst (2009) who find that not only short-term and long-term partnerships are important, but also the representation of larger and smaller organizations within a collaborative network serves the purpose of ensuring diversity of experiences as well as knowledge and resources. From this point of view, the Freiraumgalerie-case can serve as example for overcoming a potential "projectification" in urban experimentation, that tends to be the case if urban experiments are set up in the logic of traditional projects that end with the expiration date of project funding.

In his work on the city of permanent experiments, Karvonen (2018, p. 8), stresses the importance of shifting our eyes towards the actors who are not only designing and executing urban experiments, but especially towards those stakeholders who are "using the experimental outcomes to affect change". This means to not only scrutinize the process, but look beyond and study who is benefitting from the entire action. The German case of Freiraumgalerie indicates that the involved actors, namely

the municipal government, Freiraumgalerie and citizens of the neighborhood Freiimfelde benefit from the informal and illegal actions and the subsequent institutionalization of Freiraumgalerie. The municipality benefits in the way that a void was filled that could not have been approached by municipal officials due to a lack of human and financial resources; Freiraumgalerie benefits in a special way, as they were able to conduct experiments and were not restricted in any way; additionally, transforming from an informal students interest group to a regionally and nationally recognized actor in urban development, secured funding and therefore the remuneration for their work; lastly, citizens of the neighborhood benefit, as their neighborhood was brought to attention after a long time of neglect; they were given the opportunity to participate in urban development processes and therefore a process of empowerment was launched.

## *MUNICIPAL CAPACITY IN SHRINKING CITIES – OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS*

Without a doubt, shrinkage is a challenging state many municipalities are facing. It comes with serious limitations and challenges, that have been subject of discussion in the chapter 8 SHRINKING CITIES – FROM PHENOMENON TO CORNERSTONE IN URBAN RESEARCH. One of the biggest challenges tends to concern how to navigate the governance of a place while facing significant human and financial resources. Such limitations can impose a halt in capacity building for innovative practices and projects, as well as exploitation of other actor's capacity to execute administrative tasks. Eneqvist et al. (2022, p. 1610) highlight precisely, that a lack in organizational and institutional capacity in municipalities can "undermine the legitimacy of public authorities". This is true especially if municipalities focus on the results of urban experimentation, rather than the decision-making processes that lead to them. The German case of Freiraumgalerie is a special one in this regard. The findings of the case indicate that the limitations that are causing a lack of institutional and organizational capacity for experimental governance have turned out to be an opportunity for Freiraumgalerie. In this scenario, a minimal function within the urban experimentation process facilitated the success in the beginning stages. The results further indicate an amplifying role of the municipal government in the later stages by investing in a collaborative relationship with Freiraumgalerie and implementing a co-creative mindset towards citizen initiatives within the municipality. Concluding, this discussion highlights that limitations of municipalities during times of shrinkage can have beneficial outputs, if the municipality remains open and flexible towards experimental governance and meets civic initiatives at eye-level.

## *TOWARDS EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN HALLE(SAALE) – FREIRAUMGALERIE AS PIONEER*

Taken together, the presented findings of the Freiraumgalerie case indicate that through the lens of experimental governance, the case does not portray a clear picture. The five characteristics of urban experimentation (Bulkeley and Castán Broto, 2013) are not addressed sufficiently for the case to be classified explicitly. First, sustainability goals are not addressed directly by any of the involved actors. However, using arts-based methods and graffiti to shed light on vacant buildings can trigger actions that could counteract a further deterioration of such buildings. Leaving buildings vacant over a long period of time is not sustainable, as the underuse of infrastructure, such as water pipes and heating, can significantly contribute to the decay of the building. Moreover, bringing attention to vacancy in a creative way, as well as executing cultural activities, such as the All You Can Paint-festival, can significantly increase the attractiveness of a neighborhood. In turn, this can attract financial investment for upgrading deteriorated buildings. Therefore, although sustainability is not addressed directly or formulated as a goal, the findings suggest that it is addressed in an indirect manner. Second, innovative methods have been applied by Freiraumgalerie to engage citizens and present visions and concepts in a different way. This is highlighted by one civil servant as they realized quickly that the competences of Freiraumgalerie exceeded the execution of cultural activities. Through small collaborations with the municipal government, civil servants realized that Freiraumgalerie was a competent intermediary actor as well as urban planning expert, which was valuable for the municipality. From todays' point of view, the innovative methods would seem rather traditional. They involved innovative moderating techniques and approaches to engage citizens as well as the participation in painting murals and facades. Third, the actions taken can be defined as place-based approaches. The small-scale transformations of singular buildings can be understood as injections of culture and creativity that serve the purpose of the neighborhood. Fourth, the co-creation characteristic, which has been scrutinized before, indicates an ambivalent picture. The "hidden" actions of the municipality in the beginning stages of the process do not agree with the definition of co-creation per se. Nevertheless, the discussion finds that this was a necessary strategy in order to give Freiraumgalerie as much freedom as they needed to find their voice and purpose within the neighborhood Freiimfelde, and beyond. Lastly, empowerment of citizens and Freiraumgalerie as an organized group of citizens is found to be achieved in this case. Freiraumgalerie, and to an extent, inhabitants of the neighborhood, are given freedom to voice their opinions, and, implementing changes that they defined as necessary, without the municipality interfering. At the later stages, they are met at eye-level and understood as partner in urban development processes and intermediary.

# 12 CONNECTING THE DOTS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEERLEN AND HALLE(SAALE)

This section reflects on the individually presented findings in a comparative gesture and highlights commonalities and differences of the two cases, Gebrookerbos and Freiraumgalerie in order to discuss the potential of experimental governance and co-creative practices in shrinking cities. This is followed by a discussion of the facilitators and barriers of such practices that can either stimulate and amplify or hinder and prevent the unfolding of experimental governance.

## 12.1 FROM A FORMALIZED INFORMALITY TO CIVIC AUTHORITY: WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY IN SHRINKING CITIES

This discussion contributes to answering the framing research question presented in chapter 5.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

*In light of changes that are applied to local and informal governance processes in times of shrinkage, how do such experiments contribute to accommodate challenges in shrinking cities?*

This question has been divided into three sub-questions, to break down the topic of governance change. The first sub-question *RQ1: Who are the actors involved in experimental governance processes and what type of relationships have they established?* was subject of discussion of chapters 10.5 and 11.5. The objectives were to first, identify involved actors and explore how negotiation and communication takes place between them; Second, to assess the vertical and horizontal dynamics within the governance arrangement as well as investigate which role informality plays in establishing relationships.

The results show that a variety of formal and informal actors are involved in experimental governance, ranging from citizens, organized civic groups, organizations, intermediary actors as well as municipal officials. The case of Gebrookerbos shows an overrepresentation of formal actors, an underrepresented voice of individual citizens and an indispensable role of intermediary actors, whereas in the Freiraumgalerie-case, organized civic groups are the main character, municipal actors transition from “hidden” stakeholders to partners, and individual citizens indicate a minor status within

the actor constellation. The research findings highlight an interdependency between the different actors in both cases. Meijer and Syssner (2017) find, that in a shrinking context, municipalities tend to rely on community initiatives, if social capital is sufficiently developed. However, in contexts with a rather low social capital, this can lead to a contested situation. The results of the two presented cases, agree with this argument. In both cases, the municipality imposes power on citizens to a certain extent: in the German case of Freiraumgalerie, this is very obvious, and even criticized and questioned by Freiraumgalerie; in the Dutch case of Gebrookerbos, the municipality talks about giving citizens power to initiate small projects, but in reality, this authority is limited.

In terms of informality, the findings suggest that based on the successful outcomes of the experimental governance process in the case of Freiraumgalerie in contrast to Gebrookerbos, informality can be presented as a crucial characteristic that is very helpful for co-creative practices and the set-up of a collaborative network between different actors. Moreover, informality is regarded as a crucial component of institutional change towards a different understanding of citizen participation. In the case of Gebrookerbos, the results indicate a rather formalized informality, a concept that is mentioned many times, but not lived in reality. In the definition of Hospers and Syssner (2018), governmental processes are largely based on formal structures, regulations and pre-defined procedures that most of the time contradict with the logics of informality, which tends to have a spontaneous and tacit character. However, the authors stress, that informality is very relevant in shrinking areas, the planning and governing thereof. The main form of relationships tends to have informal character, however the Gebrookerbos case indicates a more formalized arena of communication and organized spaces and times for meetings for municipal officials and citizens. In contrast, the Freiraumgalerie-case shows that the key relations and communication happened in a very informal manner.

The results of the two cases build on the findings by Hospers and Syssner (2018) and I argue that informality is a key element or requirement for successful co-creative and experimental practices. Informality as a concept should not replace formal planning processes, however it should complement them and have its own validity in urban development processes in shrinking cities. Informality does not always have to include illegal actions, as it was prominent in the Freiraumgalerie, however there should be a scope for activities outside of formal regulations. Authors Bernt (2009), Coppola (2019; Hospers) or Hospers (2014) refer to “windows of opportunity” in different contexts that allow for increased collective learning between actors. The conclusions of this discussion suggest that such windows of opportunity exist to a large extent in governance structures and processes in shrinking cities, primarily due to a lack of human and financial resources. These gaps, I argue, can open the potential for increased civic engagement, if municipal officials acknowledge a need for the expansion

of informality by non-governmental and governmental actors and simultaneously appreciate civic engagement in various forms. Further, exploiting these gaps for the development of experimental governance practices and processes could then lead to long-term changes in the governance structure that include informality. This way, using the windows of opportunity that are enabled by the shrinking process, would allow for informality to step up as a supplementing concept in the governance of shrinking cities, and not an opponent that fights to exploit the cracks within a formal system.

## 12.2 FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS AT THE ADVENT OF EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE PROCESSES

The second sub-question *RQ2: How are forms of experimental governance emerging in shrinking cities and what factors are crucial for their further evolvement?* had two objectives. First, to identify what factors of shrinkage are crucial for the development of experimental governance; and second, to explore how experimental governance emerges and to assess the role of the municipality.

The findings of the discussion show that relatively similar factors of shrinkage contributed to the emergence of experimental governance in both cases, albeit to different degrees. First, physical factors such as an abundance of vacant or underused spaces that emerges due to an oversupply of infrastructures while an outmigration of citizens takes place, is an element that facilitates civic involvement. Vacant spaces such as residential vacancy or urban brownfields are some of the very challenging consequences that come with shrinkage, as not addressing the issue can lead to a spiral of problems. For example, if residential vacancy is not addressed, a further physical deterioration can occur due to a lack of maintenance. Crime rates tend to rise if vacant buildings are used for squatting and attract groups of people that use buildings for various other purposes. However, Hartt (2019, p. 14) highlights that residential vacancy can "be viewed as both advantages and disadvantages". For example, residential vacancy and brownfields can offer a great potential and opportunity for creative uses (Ziehl et al., 2012; Dubeaux and Cunningham-Sabot, 2018) or, densification projects (Banzhaf et al., 2006). In both cases, either residential vacancy or underused open spaces, have been a factor for the emergence of experimental governance. In the Dutch case of Gebrookerbos, the plethora of underused spaces can be defined as a trigger for creative or outside-the-box thinking. In the German case of Freiraumgalerie, residential vacancy can be seen as an underlying structural condition that was crucial for the group of students to even become aware of its potential.

Further, the fiscal burden that shrinkage creates on the municipal government due to lower tax revenues, and higher costs for an ageing population as well as social support services (Hospers, 2014),

often results in lower human resources and a tight budget for (innovative) projects. Both of these results are visible in the two presented cases. In the German case, the necessity for action by non-governmental actors was evidently higher than in the Dutch case. This argument is validated by the strong involvement of the project manager, a civil servant, as well as the collaboration with international planning offices to create the idea of the Gebrookerbos Atlas in the beginning stages. Such processes indicate that the institutional capacity as well as financial resources were not in a critical state, compared to the German case. On the basis of both cases, the findings indicate that a certain level of willingness or readiness of municipal governance has to be prevalent to implement changes and experimental practices (see also Ubels et al. (2019a)). In both cases this was achieved through the motivation of several individuals: the project manager and the brooker in the Dutch case, civil servants and Freiraumgalerie in the German case. This shows that individuals play a significant role in the emergence of experimental governance and can significantly shape the role of the municipal government as actor.

In addition, selective outmigration of the young and educated out of shrinking environments towards large cities that offer other opportunities is a common consequence in many shrinking cities. This leads to changes of the socio-demographic make-up of a city, with a large group of older inhabitants being left behind. While Rodríguez-Pose (1999) suggests that such processes can hamper entrepreneurship and innovative potential, Rybczynski and Linneman (1999) stress that the consequences of selective outmigration can result in a decreasing local commitment of those who stay in shrinking cities. While these consequences can apply in many cases, the discussion of the Gebrookerbos case does not agree with these assumptions. Reportedly citizens of all age groups were involved in micro-initiatives, either in leading roles or as participants. The more prominent issue was rather that people did not have the time to dedicate to such projects, which resulted in the classic participation-dilemma: most of the active citizens were those who did not work full time or were already in pension. The case of Freiraumgalerie on the other hand indicates a more differentiated scenario. The group of students were no residents in Halle(Saale) and this shows that first, ‘outsiders’ can contribute to local practices of experimental governance and second, be successful while doing this. Importantly, Freiraumgalerie put great value to get to know the neighborhood and its inhabitants and created a great network of likeminded people. Eventually, these efforts contributed to them being seen as actors of the neighborhood Freiimfelde, not outsiders.

## 12.3 EXPERIMENTAL TIPPING POINTS: ENSURING URBAN EXPERIMENTATION PRACTICES FOR THE LONG-TERM

The third and last sub-question *RQ3: In which ways can experimental forms of governance be sustained long-term?* explored if and how experimental governance processes can be transformed into long-term arrangements.

Urban experimentation has been on the rise for several years now. However, to this date the core challenge persists that experiments tend to be short-lived and have limited structural, geographical and societal impact (Potjer, 2019; Karvonen, 2018). The question of longevity of changes that arise within an experimental phase therefore is a difficult one. In particular, the shrinking cities-context offers so called windows of opportunity, as discussed previously. Such windows tend to be closed sooner or later, and going back to the previous status quo can be a goal of many policy makers. "Bouncing back" to the times before shrinkage was described as a "countering" strategy by Hospers (2014) and many other scholars. It is therefore crucial to accept shrinkage and grasp it as a temporary development or new reality. In order to do so, adaptive forms of governing are necessary that foster learning from each other and multiple ways of understand the processes taking place on the local scale. Such adaptation can have many forms. In the case of Freiraumgalerie, the institutionalization of the association was the main contributor to their long-term involvement in urban development. Additionally, the successful collaborations with the municipality have added to a changed perspective on informality and illegal practices that can take place in the city. In the case of Grebrookerbos on the other hand, securing funding streams and follow-up projects have been two crucial points that were implemented in order to sustain the Gebrookerbos method. Continuing the implementation of the method indicates the willingness of the municipality to carry on the experimental character within other contexts.

These findings indicate that the role of the municipality in sustaining experimental forms of governance or changes that have occurred in an experimental phase, is key. Building on arguments put forward by Castán Broto and Bulkeley (2013), Mukhtar-Landgren et al. (2019) or Sørensen et al. (2021), municipal governments play a distinguished role in collaborative and co-creative processes, due to their formal and legal decision-making power. Change will therefore have a hard time to occur without their involvement and belief in the proposed adaptation. In the best-case scenario, the impetus for innovation and experimentation comes from within the municipality that recognized the need for urgent change through co-creative processes. This however is dependent on many conditions such as

the political context, the historical context of participation culture, the severity as well as the implications of shrinkage, and institutional capacity for change.

## 12.4 ACCOMMODATING SHRINKAGE THROUGH URBAN EXPERIMENTATION?

In conclusion, when comparing the emergence of experimental governance across the two cases, divergent governance contexts and different shrinkage trajectories and degrees of severity, as well as varied participation cultures, the similarities between the cases stand out visibly. Summarizing these findings with regard to the overall research question:

***In light of changes that are applied to local and informal governance processes in times of shrinkage, how do such experiments contribute to accommodate challenges in shrinking cities?***

Experimental governance practices have to be scrutinized towards their actual effects on shrinkage. The three sub-questions presented earlier discussed aspects of the overall question. In this final chapter of findings, the aim is to explore to what extent the implemented changes can are actually suitable to address the implications of shrinkage. This is possible to an extent, as both cases have implemented the projects and processes several years ago. This is why cautiously discussing short and long-term consequences is justified.

In the Dutch case of Gebrookerbos, the addressed and pressing challenge of shrinkage, namely a plethora of open spaces, was formulated as an underlying problem in the beginning stages of the project. The loss of "quality and vitality" (Damoiseaux and Reinders, 2019) of the city is largely attributed to the lack of uses of the areas that once were used as coal extraction spaces. This issue entails several challenges such as the further deterioration of such open spaces, or even a rise of criminal activities. Such issues can provoke a feeling of neglect for citizens. Paired with scarce financial resources in the municipal government, the solution was to involve citizens to a greater extent than they were used to and let go of strict regulations.

Simultaneously, addressing citizens with this project and offering them the opportunity to realize their ideas for micro-initiatives has two effects on them. On the one hand, inhabitant's sense of belonging and place attachment can be woken up or strengthened because they see the physical changes to their neighborhood, that were introduced by them. On the other hand, citizens can experience a greater sense of responsibility to co-create sustainable solutions for their neighborhoods. According to scholarship on co-production and civic participation in shrinking cities (Schlappa, 2017;

Hospers, 2013; Leetma et al., 2015), by letting go of top-down and government-steered solutions, citizens can be understood as endogenous resource that adds to the accommodation of shrinkage. I argue that by putting emphasis on co-creation and innovative, experimental forms of governing, citizens themselves can better grasp and defend their role as actor in urban development and bring forth intrinsic motivation to be involved in urban and neighborhood processes. All these aspects indicate that the willingness of municipal governments to rethink established power structures and to address empowerment of citizens in order to trigger social transformation such as a more inclusive decision-making process, is vital (Mitlin, 2008; Turnhout et al., 2019). The third research question that was answered in the previous chapter already mentioned that individuals can take a great and formative role in the emergence of experimental governance. Addressing contested power relations goes hand in hand with this result. By advocating for a truly experimental process, stakeholders have to commit to the co-creative thought, which in its definition questions long established and traditional modes of governing.

As a result, the lack of planning instruments to address shrinkage can be re-evaluated and innovative ways to deal with the challenges can be created in a co-creative way. A prerequisite for this however is, that municipal governments accept shrinkage and work with the new reality. Considering the "wickedness" of shrinkage, adaptive and flexible strategies that focus on collaboration and post-structuralist approaches that embrace shrinkage, should lay the foundation for such undertakings.

The two presented cases, the shrinking cities of Heerlen, Netherlands and Halle(Saale), Germany, portray two examples of cities that overcame shrinkage by stabilizing their population and moving on from their mono-industrial past. These cases are real life examples of urban systems that transform constantly and do not return to their initial state, but adapt towards new realities. As complexity sciences scholarship argues, such transformations do not happen randomly, but through action. This holds true in the German and the Dutch case, as both profited from the actions that were taken by municipal governments, by civic organizations, or jointly in a co-creative way. In the Dutch case, this action happened in a more coordinated and formalized way, whereas the German case indicates a rather clumsy process that was shaped by informality. In both cases still, the results were unexpected (see Boelens and Roo, 2014). The Gebrookerbos case unexpectedly turned into a movement that was carried on throughout other international projects but also within the context of commercial vacancy in the inner-city district. The Freiraumgalerie case can be regarded as unexpected in its entire process, as the success and institutionalization and professionalization of the group was completely unforeseen, even by the group themselves.

In conclusion, several policy recommendations can be derived from the main findings of the presented research. These suggestions address the dimensions of Governing shrinking cities, institutional capacity and capacity building in times of shrinkage, power structures and struggles as well as future orientations.

| POLICY DIRECTIONS |
| --- |
| 1) Accept and utilize shrinkage |
| 2) Work with the reduced institutional capacity by reallocating responsibilities |
| 3) Reconsider given power dynamics between various actors |
| 4) Move towards a (socially) sustainable future |

First, within a world of constant and unexpected change, policy makers must consider their strategies towards a development like shrinkage. In the past, the first cases of critical structural shrinkage were novel, planning instruments did not fit this development and a general pessimistic view was noticeable. With the plethora of academic research and shrinking cities all over the world, we can see multiple possible pathways cities can take when dealing with shrinkage. While accepting shrinkage is the first step, utilizing shrinkage is necessary to exploit the potentials and conditions that open up windows of opportunity. As the cases have shown, this requires an inner belief of individuals who have significant decision-making power within municipal governments. Further, the two cases show that there are no “right” conditions that would trigger the acceptance or utilization strategy. While objectively the Heerlen case looks less severe than the Halle(Saale) case, experimental approaches have been implemented in both cities. The conditions for the advent of experimental governance therefore are not defined as a requisite that predefines the success of the approach. However, conditions such as an established participatory culture can allow for an easier materialization of experimental governance and co-creative processes.

Second, evidently capacity and capacity-building for experimental approaches towards governing shrinking cities is scarce. However, it is an important subject that requires attention when discussing (public) organizations and addressing their ability to perform. Institutional capacity involves resources, financial and human ones, as well as defined structures. This is their way of operating. Assuming that municipal governments can implement informality within long established procedures easily and quickly, would be naïve. In addition, the circumstances of shrinkage do not provide the best conditions for such changes. Nonetheless, as this thesis has shown, shrinkage can be a good time to reallocate

scarce resources, evaluate activities and reflect on the prioritization of goals. The case of Gebrookerbos in particular has shown that tensions within municipalities can arise when novel concepts enter the arena, because clear boundaries and established procedures become blurred. This is where capacity-building comes into play and requires an adaptation of those established processes.

Third, the results of this work have shown that acknowledging citizens as endogenous potential and resource, can assist in urban transformations in times of shrinkage. During a transformative process, such as shrinkage, taking a step back and reconsidering underlying power struggles between urban actors, is beneficial. In particular, the Freiraumgalerie case has shown positive developments when civic organizations are given freedom to act. I argue however, that such processes need to gain momentum and receive legitimacy constantly. This way, a certain degree of robustness of new power dynamics is achieved, which is vital to not lose trust of citizens. A good way towards such reconsiderations is the primary step of installing navigators, brokers, connectors, mediators or intermediary actors. In accordance with existing research (Simon, 2021; Matyushkina et al., 2023), this work underlines the necessity of mediating actors for the shifting of power dynamics. They contribute to this by acting as a neutral space between citizens and municipal officials as they are able to think beyond the constraints of formal organizations and connect them with other domains, such as the private or the citizens' arena. In addition, they have the key role to make sure that both sides are heard in negotiating and decision-making processes and can translate the needs of the different actors.

Fourth, addressing the immediate challenges of shrinkage should be prioritized in order to maintain a degree of quality of life in shrinking cities. Nevertheless, shrinking cities have to conquer similar futures that growing cities will do to a certain extent. In this regard, sustainability has to be addressed. In fact, as the study has shown, sustainable solutions with regard to vacancy or brownfields are on the agenda of shrinking cities already. Paired with a co-creative approach, social sustainability can be incorporated in strategies that go beyond a project base.

# PART E: CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

The objective of this research was to explore innovative ways of Governing in shrinking cities. While this undertaking was challenging due to a significant lack of examples that can be found while researching modes of governance in shrinking cities, the results of the two presented cases indicate much more than the answer to the research questions. This final chapter summarizes the conclusions drawn from this research, considering the contribution to the theoretical discourse on shrinking cities as well as the contribution to governance practices on the ground. The latter in particular builds on existing but scarce research on co-creation and co-production in shrinking cities, but finds that the results can widen the scholarship on urban experimentation in general. With this concluding chapter, I draw on the notions of complexity sciences, that are found to be applicable and helpful when researching shrinking cities especially, and stress that a different perspective on shrinkage is necessary; Namely, a view that shrinkage is a chapter in the urban development of a city, but not and end state, or new reality. With this perspective, a final rejection of predictability of urban development processes takes place and allows to see cities as systems that are always in flux. I conclude that this point of view can open up a multitude of different and positive pathways for cities experiencing shrinkage that adequately address pressing challenges.

# 13 UNINTENTIONAL LIVING LABS IN SHRINKING CITIES? UNEXPECTED FINDINGS ADVANCING THE DISCOURSE.

Reflecting on the conducted research, that I commenced with the intention to further deepen the understanding of processes and manifestations of shrinkage on the local and neighborhood level with particular interest in active citizenship and governance structures, I did not expect to find results that go beyond this task. Driven by personal interest in democratic accountability and formal as well as informal ways of participation and co-creation, the interest in this theme was accelerated by claims such as "civic engagement is Europe's most important urban shrinkage challenge" (Hospers, 2014, p. 1508). However, it became apparent that not only shrinkage is a "hot topic" (Elzerman and Bontje, 2015), but urban experimentation is, too (Hajer, 2016). More importantly, in my research I found that these two topics overlap in a very interesting way. While some scholars argue that shrinkage is an "unavoidable trajectory" (Ročak, 2019), my understanding of shrinkage after completed this thesis is more in line with Buzar et al. (2005), who speak of "urban transformation". My research indicates that the two presented cases have conducted unintentional social living labs, without labelling or promoting them this way. Research on living labs is currently invading the research landscape with an unmatched vigor. Innovation and experimentation have become *the* buzzwords – yet to a large extent, only in growing and prospering cities. Thompson (2018) identifies a new research field that questions the conventional idea of innovation that is largely associated with neoliberal orientations and economic growth, but does not significantly contribute to structural changes, changing the "rules of the game" as he calls it. Social innovation has entered the arena with the aim to trigger disruptive change in institutional settings and social relations, representing a key element of experimental governance. In detail, social innovation is concerned with systemic and institutional change, and therefore goes beyond the exclusive consideration of the individual scale (Chalmers, 2012).

In conclusion, while discussing the findings in order to answer the posed research questions for this dissertation, it became apparent that these results advance the research discourse on (i) shrinking cities, (ii) governance and (iii) living labs. The shrinking cities discourse has been advanced by a cautious complexity sciences perspective that particularly influences the way of conceptualizing shrinkage – namely, as an urban transformation process, as a state of becoming, and shrinking cities as cities in flux. Such an understanding opens up a positive view on shrinking cities that allows to look for the opportunities and focus on the potential that shrinkage can offer and not dwell only on the negative implications. In this thesis, I understand shrinking cities as complex systems which are unpredictable

and develop in a non-linear way. Therefore, I distance myself from the belief that shrinkage triggers a deterministic downwards spiral that cannot be overcome. Although the two presented cases are well-researched in the scientific scholarship, this contribution expands the understanding of the processes that have occurred significantly. Secondly, the discourse on governing shrinking cities has been built on, by moving beyond a policy-perspective towards the micro-level of individual's actions and everyday life. The scholarship on governance is overwhelming and spreads into all kinds of domains. Governing shrinking cities similarly has been addressed by many and defined in multiple ways. I take on a view that looks at actions by the involved actors, who were citizens, civic organizations, intermediaries and civil servants because in a collaborative, experimental and co-creative setting, actions by individuals matter. They matter even more, when understanding cities and neighborhoods as complex adaptive systems, to trace where and when adaptive moments are triggered. Third, and unexpectedly, I find that the actions taken in the presented cases fit the discussion on urban and social living labs very well. The discourse on urban living labs specifically emerged within the sustainability discussion. They have taken over the research landscape and present findings from great European projects that have been carried out with a plethora of funding for such infrastructures. They are forums and arenas that showcase, test and develop new products or services and evaluate them as solutions to pressing issues within a real-world context. However, I argue that this has been done in the Gebrookerbos and Freiraumgalerie case as well, without being an obvious target. Experimenting in the real context of the shrinking cities and targeting a co-creative process as well as knowledge transfer and empowerment, took place in Heerlen and Halle(Saale). Cautiously I argue, that the cases were as successful in their own way, because they were not labelled as "urban or social living labs". These unintentional living labs therefore show, that urban experimentation is a research domain that can be present in times of shrinkage and does not need to be backed up by an abundance of funding resources.

# 14CRISES AS REAL-WORLD LABORATORIES: A CRITICAL REFLECTION

While the overall results of this research as well as the unexpected findings discussed in chapter 13 UNINTENTIONAL LIVING LABS IN SHRINKING CITIES? UNEXPECTED FINDINGS ADVANCING THE DISCOURSE., rightfully indicate a rather positive atmosphere, using crises, such as shrinkage for experimentation needs to be critically reflected. In times of austerity politics finding their way in many governments and governing processes, the withdrawal of the state's responsibility for public well-being in times of a rising responsibilization of civic society must be reflected. The retrenchment of public responsibilities simultaneously, or consequently, triggered a discussion on social innovation that was displayed as a "normative good" (Osborne and Brown, 2011). The fine line between facilitation and cooptation of socially innovative experimentation becomes apparent in times of crises, where inhabitants are witnessing a breakaway of physical infrastructure, memories and a flight of the young and educated population. A greater individual responsibility and glorification of active citizenship (Hurenkamp et al., 2011; Verhoeven and Tonkens, 2013), takes place by the usage of public strategies, such as the "empowerment talk" or "responsibility talk" (Verhoeven and Tonkens, 2013) that aim to address in an emotional way the need for a more active society. Although the findings of this research show that crises can open up conditions, "policy windows" that allow for greater civic participation and informal processes, these conditions are actively promoted by municipal governments or even used in a goal-oriented manner. They way governments use a distinct language to trigger a personal obligation to contribute to society, quality of life, healthcare and other areas, feels particular out of place in contexts where the participation culture is a contested matter to begin with. The example here is Heerlen, Netherlands, where the conditions for an active society have not been laid in the past, on the contrary, citizens have lived in a controlled and planned realm for many years due to the mining history and the associated unbalanced power dynamics. Therefore, if (municipal) governments ask for active citizenship and social innovation in a broader sense within the context of a crisis, such as shrinkage, they should be ready and eager to welcome suggested changes and transformations posed by citizens. Social innovation seems to be a double-edged sword, that is demanded and resisted at the same time by institutionalized procedures.

# 15 LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY

Assuring transparency of the presented research, a short reflection on the research process and the limitations it goes with, is useful. First, this research clearly states that it applies a comparative gesture, not a rigid comparison. Still, the two cases reflect a Western European shrinkage-context and are embedded within a certain degree of democratic accountability that are quite similar. The research lacks to portray an alternative institutional and cultural context. The choice of case studies was largely based on accessibility and language proficiency. This indicates a limitation to the study that could benefit from a contrasting case to enlarge the richness of findings. Further, the comparative gesture applied in this research, does not allow for a systematic comparative analysis of political and institutional settings, legal frameworks such as planning laws and regulations. It was a deliberate choice to not systematically compare such dimensions as the shrinking context was found to play a distinctive role in circumventing such barriers. The social and societal circumstances have been found to place a more important factor for the topic of experimental governance and co-creation. The objective was specifically formulated to accommodate this interest.

Regarding the qualitative approach chosen for this research, I want to acknowledge the limitations that come with the conducted interviews. While the presented data do not claim to provide representative findings, in addition, the number of interviews was scarce. However, not only the number of interviews but also the approach of semi-structured expert interviews provides a barrier for this kind of research. Walking interviews or an action-based, ethnographic approach would have allowed for a deeper understanding of belonging, neighborhood upgrading and individual meaning making. Several interviews had to take place via online tools, such as Zoom or WhatsApp Video, which further hindered the experience of a face-to-face conversation. Further, the German case of Freiraumgalerie could only be presented by a handful of interviews. After several months of reaching out to the group, only one person, a past member of Freiraumgalerie expressed interest, while all other efforts were ignored. This makes the proper presentation of the case very difficult.

# 16 OUTLOOK: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The results and unexpected findings of this dissertation point to several directions future research can investigate that would be interesting additions and expansions of the topics shrinking cities and experimental governance.

First, this thesis has explored one case study in each of the two countries. National and regional regulations or incentives are worthwhile exploring in a more structural way and could give more insights in the restrictions municipalities on the local level have to accept. Therefore, more research is needed of different municipalities in one country scrutinizing pathways of experimental governance. Such insights could highlight structural barriers but also facilitating factors on a national and regional level.

Second, the main topic of this work was shrinking cities. While more research on various aspects of shrinking cities is needed and would expand this academic field, contrasting the findings of urban experimentation in shrinking contexts with those in growing cities would highlight differences in participatory processes or funding aspects. Further, this thesis discussed the degree of municipal involvement in urban experimentation, different roles municipalities take and the changing role of municipalities over the course of one project. Further research could expand this research direction and explore in detail intra-organizational dynamics of municipal actors across different sectors. Urban experimentation and the rapid rise of urban living labs did in fact trigger the set-up of departments for supporting and funding these kinds of approaches. However, municipalities are no unitary actors but are often treated as such. Research on dynamics, frictions or cooperations between various departments would highlight how they understand their role within experimental governance, since they significantly shape the conditions in which civic involvement can thrive. Moreover, research on unwritten customs, habits, informal routines and norms within municipalities could further expand the field on institutional capacity and capacity-building, not only in shrinking cities but in growing cities, too.

Third, in a similar understanding, civic society is oftentimes referred to as one actor. This group, however, could not be more heterogenous. The common challenge of participation – namely, the participation of a group of people who can articulate themselves in a good way, have spare time to dedicate for voluntary work and are able to use certain channels to access participatory opportunities – must be tackled. If urban experimentation is a co-creative practice, other organized stakeholders

must make a significant effort to reach underrepresented groups. While this is easier said than done, there are numerous ways of overcoming these limitations: using artificial intelligence for simultaneously translating conversations into other languages, offering digital and analog ways of participation or engage audiences through immediate polls and surveys, just to name a few. Research on the challenges of participation has come a long way while existing instruments and software products have proliferated in the past years in order to overcome these limitations. Research on how participatory processes are facilitated in shrinking cities in general could shed light on the underlying issues that still exists, whether it is motivation, financial resources or capacity-challenges.

A fourth dimension could explore whether the actions taken in the presented cases could be applicable in other cities that have a mining history. The green transition will force many cities all over the world to accelerate the phasing out of coal as a resource. These cities will sooner or later have to deal with the economic and societal implications this will trigger. Learning from shrinking cities which have experienced such transitions can help in a smoother transition that might not have to trigger the consequences we are familiar with in shrinking cities. Finding ways to engaging citizens in the upcoming transition could be a first step.

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# Tables and Figures

# Declaration of Authenticity

I declare that I completed the dissertation independently and used only the materials that are listed. All materials used, whether directly quoted or paraphrased, are duly reported. I further declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for examination or publication.

_____ _____

(Date, Place) (Signature)

# AGNES MATOGA

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Researcher at KIT, Karlsruhe


*Curriculum Vitae*

## Education

04/2019 – 11/2024 **PhD in Political Science (Dr. rer. Pol.)**
RPTU Rheinland-Pfälzische Technische Universität Kaiserslautern-Landau
Thesis: Steering Shrinkage? Actor constellations and regeneration governance in accommodating Shrinkage
Re-City ITN Project, Marie Sklodowska-Curie Action, Horizon 2020

09/2021 – 04/2022 Maternity Leave

10/2015 – 06/2018 **Master of Arts (MA) in Spatial Research and Spatial Planning.** (with high distinction)
University of Vienna, Department of Geography and Regional Research.
Main focus: Temporary urbanism, gentrification and housing market, informal and bottom-up space appropriation, creative industries, neighborhood development.

10/2014 – 02/2015 Erasmus Semester Abroad.
University of Technology Cracow, Department for Architecture and Urban Planning.

03/2011 – 04/2015 **Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Spatial Planning.**
University of Technology Vienna.
Main focus: Gentrification, economic and social relevance of transformation processes in cities.

## Academic and Practical Experience

10/2022 – **Research Associate**
Karlsruher Institute for Technology, Institute of Regional Science
Horizon Europe project PREFIGURE (scientific coordination)
Teaching in the Master Programme "Regional Science and Planning"

08/2018 Internship at FFG mbH Wien (Austrian Research Promotion Agency). Employed as: assistant of the thematic projects-working group (TP)

10/2016 – 08/2017 Teaching and Research Assistant for Human Geography.
University of Vienna, Department for Geography and Regional Research.

03/2016 – 02/2018 Tutor for the courses ‚Applied Urban Research', ‚Techniques of Scientific Work', ‚Local and Regional Planning Instruments'. University of Vienna, Department for Geography and Regional Research.

04/2016 – 07/2016 Research Assistant of Dr. Yvonne Franz.

- Empirical and analytical contribution to the research project
- Contribution to practical advices in the conduction of quantitative and semi-structured qualitative interviews
- Analyzing questionnaires on quality of living and social interaction

02/2016 – 09/2016 IC Facility Management GmbH, employed as: Assistant of the neighborhood management-team, Viertel Zwei.

07/2015 Internship at Gebietsbetreuung Stadterneuerung (Urban Renewal Office) 9/17/18.

- Care and development of urban renewal projects in the 17th district
- preparation of plans
- research.

08/2014 – 09/2014 Internship at FFG mbH Wien. Employed as: Projectcontrolling and Audit-support: assisting in the audit of individual research projects.

## Teaching Experience

04/2022 - Project seminar for Master Students: "Gemeinsam Stadt_Machen – Ein interaktives CitizenLab mit der Karlsruher Südstadt" (Cocreating the city – an interactive CitizenLab with the South of Karlsruhe city), KIT (IfR), co-taught with Prof. Michael Janoschka, Anna-Barbara Grebhan, Saebom Song

04/2022 Lecture and seminar for Master Students: "Participatory and digital tools for empirical research", KIT (IfR), co-taught with Prof. Michael Janoschka, Anna-Barbara Grebhan

04/2022 Lecture and seminar for Master Students: Qualitative Research Methods, co-taught with Prof. Michael Janoschka

04/2022 Lecture for Master Students: "Urban planning – foundations and practical implementation", KIT (IfR), co-taught with Steven Ross

08/2021 – 12/2021 Supervision of Bachelor Thesis *Sustainable Urban Development of the Smart City Vienna with special consideration of the Mobility Transition*

TU Kaiserslautern, IPS

04/2021 – 08/2021 Bachelor's project *From participation to active citizenship: Spatial effects of revitalization strategies in Heerlen, Netherlands*
TU Kaiserslautern, IPS

03/2018 – 06/2019 Bachelor's course *Applied Urban Research* (Summer Term 2018, Winter Term 2018/19, Summer Term 2019)
Content: complexities of public space, quantitative and qualitative methods. University of Vienna, Department for Geography and Regional Research

10/2018 Invitation as expert on temporary use (Excursion on the topic of „Housing for all?" by Dr. Yvonne Franz and Dr. Elisabeth Gruber) University of Vienna, Department for Geography and Regional Research

### Voluntary work and networks

12/2022 Member of the Editorial Board of plaNext – Next Generation Planning (international peer-reviewed open-access e-journal by the AESOP Young Academics)

04/2019 – 09/2022 Social Media Manager for Re-City ITN

- Managing the platforms Instagram and twitter

07/2018 – 05/2020 Chair of the AESOP Young Academics Coordination Team (since 06/2019)

- Organization of Planning Conferences for Young Academics (review and selection of abstracts and best paper, hosting a General Assembly, HR)
- Publishing of the international, peer reviewed and open access journal PlaNext
- Organization of PhD-workshops (working together with the Local Organizing Committee, selection of YA mentors, hosting a General Assembly, HR)
- Involvement in the Booklet Series ‚Conversations in Planning'

10/2016 – 07/2018 Founder and Editor in Chief of the student magazine „georg___"
Publishing of 3 issues, recruiting contributors, editing

09/2017 & 09/2016 Summer Schools: L.E. School of Urbanism: social and urban transformation & Boomtown Leipzig – Living and Housing in Growth. University of Leipzig, Department of Geography.

07/2016 Vienna Summer School in Urban Studies: Understanding Public Spaces: Unraveling Complexities. University of Vienna, Department of Geography and Regional Research.

## Conference Presentations and Publications

| Title | Conference, Location, Date |
|---|---|
| „How media shape the perception of temporary use. A qualitative media analysis on vacancy and temporary uses in Vienna."<br>***Winner of the Best Paper Award***<br>***disP-The Planning Review, Vol. 55, 85-96***<br>*https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2019.1598114* | AESOP Young Academics Conference 2017; Munich, Germany; 10 – 13 March, 2017. |
| „Deconstructing temporary use. A tool between bottom-up and top-down urbanism within a changing planning culture?"<br>***Runner-up for Best Paper Award*** | AESOP Young Academics Conference 2018; Groningen, Netherlands; 26 – 29 March, 2018. |
| „Governance of temporary use."<br>***Winner of the Young Academics Best Paper Award***<br>***Published ahead of print***<br>***Urban Planning and Design, Vol. 172, 4, 159-168***<br>*https://doi.org/10.1680/jurdp.18.00052* | AESOP Annual Congress 2018; Gothenburg, Sweden; 10 – 14 July, 2018. |
| "Adapting Governance processes in times of shrinkage. The example of Gebrookerbos in Heerlen, Netherlands." | AESOP Young Academics Conference, online, March 29-April 1, 2021 |
| „Governance in Shrinking Cities. The role of active citizenship in emerging experimental governance" | AAG Conference, online, 7-11 April, 2021 |
| "Governing Shrinkage. The role of civic initiatives." | IGU Conference, Poznan, online, 23-24 June, 2021 |
| "The limits of co-production in shrinking cities. Case studies from Netherlands, France and Latvia." | Symposium "Delivering Urban Transformation Through Co-Production" TU Dortmund, 24-25 January, 2022 |

## Publications

Matyushkina, A., LeBorgne, S., Matoga, A. (2022): Overcoming the limitations to co-production in shrinking cities: insights from Latvia, France, and the Netherlands. European Planning Studies (accepted for publication)

Matoga, A. (2022): Changing governance processes to make way for civic involvement: the case of Gebrookerbos in Heerlen, Netherlands. Sustainability 2022, 14(16): 10126. Special Issue: Reviving Shrinking Cities for Being More Sustainable, Just and Resilient-Prospects and Challenges for Urban Transformation, Policymaking and Planning, https://doi.org/10.3390/su141610126

Matoga, A., (2022): Governance in accommodating shrinkage and uncertainties in decision making. In: Pallagst, K. et al. (eds) Handbook on Shrinking Cities.

Matoga, A. & Franz, Y. (2018): Stadtteilentwicklung in den Niederlanden: Zwischen „active citizenship" und kooperativen Planungsansätzen. Zur Vorbereitung und Durchführung einer Fachexkursion mit Geographiestudierenden. Geographische Rundschau, Heft 7-8/2018, Niederlande.

Matoga, A., Doyle, A., Avellini, E. and Vari, C. (2017): The Anyone - Anywhere Space(s)? Analyzing Diversity in Public Spaces. In: Franz, Y., C. Hintermann (eds.) (2017): Unravelling Complexities. Understanding Public Spaces. https://verlag.oeaw.ac.at/unravelling-complextities.