

## 6 Urban regeneration as a collaborative effort – strategic responses to decline in East Germany

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### Introduction

After decades of growth, many prosperous economies started to face multidimensional consequences of rapid deindustrialisation. The phenomenon was particularly widespread in Europe, where nearly one third of all cities underwent at least one decade of population decline since the 1960s (Turok & Mykhnenko, 2007). The so-called “downward spiral” that a number of cities got into most commonly commenced with loss of employment opportunities, which further lead to urban decline and outmigration, usually with alarming rates. For some years now, this phenomenon has been in the focus of both urban studies and planning practice. Although a vast body of literature dealt with experiences from declining industrial cities from the perspective of the Global North, the extreme downfall of the former industrial giants in the context of the U.S.A. has attracted major attention.

Based on the research undertaken so far, early responses to urban decline usually involved pragmatic physical redevelopments of some exposed inner-city brownfields and derelict infrastructures (Moulaert, Rodriguez, & Swyngedouw, 2004). More knowledge on the phenomenon helped in the formulation of some more comprehensive strategies, while a number of cities shifted towards the tertiary sector and high-tech industries, and even reached significant growth. However, the majority of others haven't coped that successfully with the situation, which in such cases often has led to even more dramatic downfalls and further declines in population. Different impacts on socio-economic and political restructuring, on the one hand, highlighted origins and advancements of the phenomenon of urban decline as highly context and location specific. Furthermore, often associated with combating the trend in decline were diverse interests and preferences of a number of actors. Dealing with such comprehensive urban phenomena thus necessarily required constructive engagements across the boundaries of different spheres in order to bring stakeholders together and trigger innovative solutions.

As Emerson et al. pointed out, the principle of collaborative, cross-boundary governance has the potential not only to “generate impacts and adaptations across the systems” (Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012, p. 1), but also

“to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished” (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 2). However, in spite of the rising scholarly interest for collaborative governance on all levels, “its definition remains amorphous and its use inconsistent” (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 1), while evidence remains scarce when it comes to the performance and impact of such frameworks for managing the complexity of urban decline in practice (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, & Cunningham-Sabot, 2012). Furthermore, considering thereby a misbalance in the geographical representation of cases, this chapter focuses on the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) as a rather specific case that allows plenty of opportunities for testing collaborative governance frameworks in practice. This case is rather particular considering that nearly all of its cities experienced rapid depopulation following the fall of state socialism and the “shock therapy” of socio-economic restructuring after German reunification (Bontje, 2004).

In contrast to other western countries where the state traditionally played a less important role in urban planning, since the early 2000s, the German Federal government has actively dealt with the problem of extreme population loss and urban decline in accordance with the specifics of its planning system. These experiences were largely based on setting integrative frameworks for encouraging collaborative governance on a local level, finally making the German approach particularly interesting for broadening scholarly knowledge on understanding both the phenomenon of decline itself, along with finding effective and innovative ways for achieving economic redevelopment. On the other hand, despite a number of innovative mechanisms for collective action that collaborative governance has provided in the case of East German cities, its efficiency showed it would be hard to reach in practice, as collaborative action is difficult to accomplish in situations when “shared goals and operating rationale for taking action are not made explicit” (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 17). This chapter thus aims at highlighting practical implications of collaborative-based strategic frameworks using the outcomes of national and local government initiatives in Germany to manage the complexity of the urban decline phenomenon. Special attention is paid to Leipzig and Dresden, as these cities are considered to be the most advanced in reaching economic (re)development in the former GDR.

In order to formulate appropriate frameworks for achieving economic redevelopment, acknowledging and fully understanding the complexity behind the phenomenon of urban decline seems to be of crucial importance. The following section thus summarizes the most relevant perspectives on this phenomenon.

### **Current perspectives on the phenomenon of urban decline**

The debates on urban decline started at the end of the 1990s; however, the concept was formulated way before. The term “shrinking cities” (*schrumpfende Städte*) was introduced by Häußermann and Siebel in the late 1980s,

when they described both decline in population and economic performance in some German cities resulting from deindustrialisation (Häußermann & Siebel, 1988). The U.S. American perspective on the same phenomenon referred to urban decline of its industrial cities (Pallagst, Wiechmann, & Martinez-Fernandez, 2011), although a number of authors also used alternative terms, such as urban decay or simply depopulation. Despite different terminology and the fact that there is still no general definition adopted to fully describe the phenomenon, a consensus was reached on its major causes in de-industrialisation, suburbanisation, and demographic changes (Fritsche et al., 2007). As these phenomena were by no means restricted to German, U.S., or U.K. contexts, the discourse on urban decline spread to the international arena, with enormous potential of cross-national knowledge still to be exploited (Großmann, Bontje, Haase, & Mykhnenko, 2013).

Despite its multidimensional effects, the more extensive knowledge on the phenomenon of urban decline for establishing effective strategic frameworks in strategies for economic redevelopment has caught international attention relatively recently. The reasons for this should be found in the dominant paradigm among planners and policymakers exclusively set on growth since early industrialisation (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Martinez-Fernandez & Wu, 2009; Oswalt & Rienets, 2006). The course of economic and population expansion was previously not only the aim, but also the imperative, with an underlying assumption that all cities and towns could achieve such universal development goals. These objectives, and their many associated taboos, started to change since the turn of the millennia. First, the process of urban decline was recognized as much more complex than it had been seen before. Instead of population loss as its most visible and measurable effect that has often been used as a relevant parameter to quantitatively encompass and measure shrinkage (Beauregard, 2007), the phenomenon was acknowledged as a multidimensional process, including its effects on the socioeconomic potentials of a city or a region in question. Second, as the topic got more broadly discussed, the focus gradually shifted away from growth-oriented approaches. Hidden potentials of the phenomenon became the focus of discussions after a number of researchers called for innovative alternatives, (Frazier & Bagchi-Sen, 2015; Haase, Athanasopoulou, & Rink, 2013; Ringel, 2014), along with considerations of new action schemes to relate shrinkage with urban sustainability and liveability (Delken, 2008; Endlicher & Langer, 2007; Schetke & Haase, 2008). After the debate finally spread to praxis, planners and policymakers even started to consider implementation of policies for the so-called “managed” or “smart” decline (Frazier & Bagchi-Sen, 2015; Frazier, Bagchi-Sen, & Knight, 2013).

Considering a concept described by Emerson et al. (Emerson et al., 2012), acknowledgment of urban decline as a comprehensive and multidimensional process, in which affected communities rely on their local resources to deal with the causes and consequences of long-term decline, could be considered as one of the major prerequisites for establishing collaborative arrangements

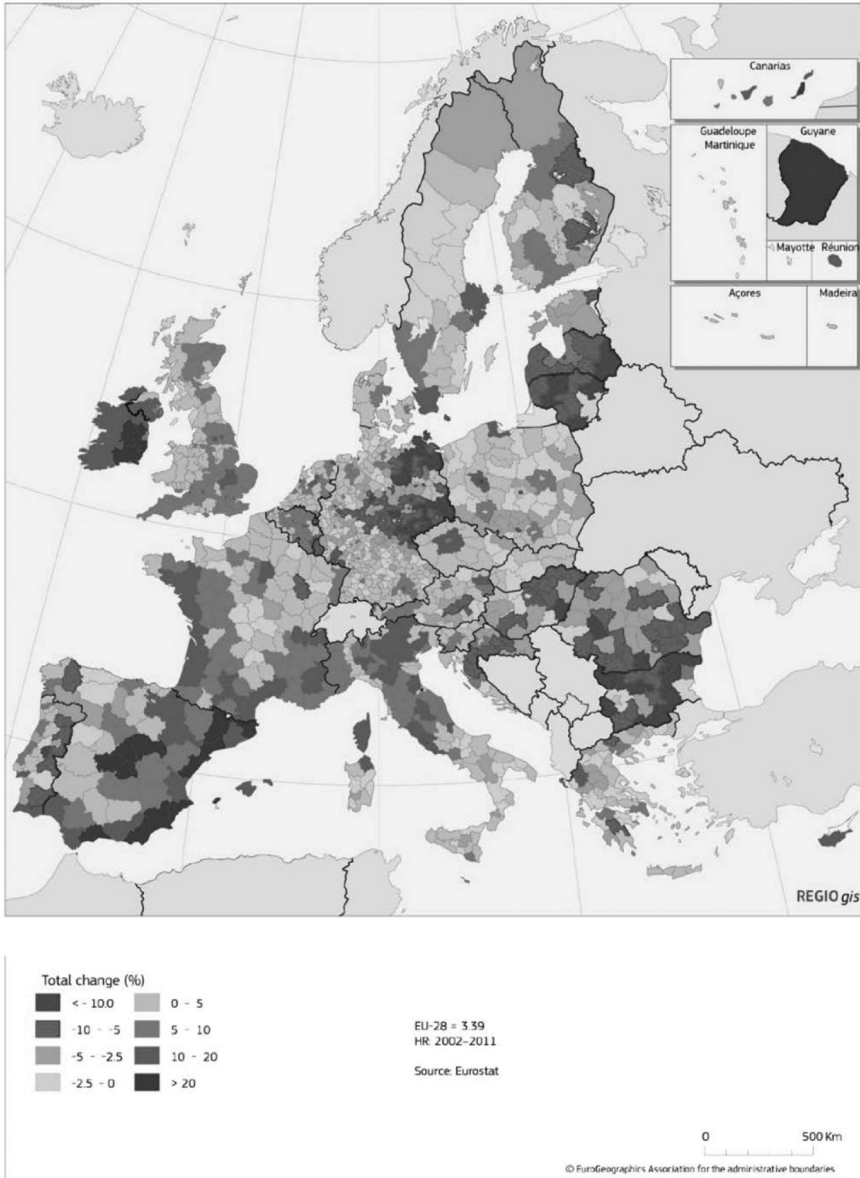
for economic redevelopment in practice. Nevertheless, although an increasing number of scholars argued that collaborative initiatives could enhance capacities of cities to combat the causes and consequences of decline, there was also evidence showing that local decision-makers were often confronted with many difficulties in practice to engage their communities in the process of coproduction (Schlappa, 2015; Wirth, Elis, Müller, & Yamamoto, 2016). In spite of many recent advances, urban research still faces the challenge to not only investigate trajectories and hardly predictable overall trends of urban decline, but also to examine solutions to deal with this phenomenon in greater depth (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012; Steinführer et al., 2010).

Before illustrating the above-elaborated issues using the case of East German cities, the following section provides a brief overview of the most relevant initiatives at the level of the European Union (EU) that fostered and largely influenced integration of collaborative models into a governance framework across the European declining cityscape.

### **Integrated approach to urban regeneration in European policy framework**

Concerning the fact that a large part of the former GDR was structurally significantly weaker and more rural than its western counterpart, its cities and communities were generally more prone to demographic changes and development problems after the reunification in the year 1990. However, urban decline was not an exclusive problem for reunified Germany. Some recent research demonstrated that nearly 40% of all European cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants have been experiencing a population decline over the last few decades (EU, 2016; Turok & Mykhnenko, 2007), with a major pole of shrinkage situated in post-socialist countries<sup>1</sup> (Figure 6.1). Aside from the exceptional conditions for massive outmigration, many of these countries have also been facing decades of declining fertility rates. Although such a situation necessarily would require a cross-boundary approach, the general lack of direct responses to urban decline at the EU policy level resulted from planning and development remaining a matter of national governments (Haase et al., 2013). An alternative to create a more even ratio between population and employment opportunities among the EU countries were thus various schemes for financing local projects that would foster the engagement of local communities and collaboration between public, private, and third-sector organizations (Soto, Houk, & Ramsden, 2012).

The recently introduced strategy “Europe 2020” proposed by the European Commission (EC) advocates for smart, sustainable, and inclusive development, aiming to foster cohesion among highly diverse European regions (EU, 2012; EC, 2014). These core principles were also present in a number of programs and initiatives dealing with urban regeneration issues. The EC previously set up the integrated approach “URBAN Community Initiative”



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Figure 6.1 Change in European population 2001–2011.

Source: European Commission, 2014: 85.

in 1994, which started as URBAN I (1994–1999), and prolonged to its second phase as URBAN II (2000–2006). Aside from the partnership principle in urban regeneration contexts, the general aim was to support innovation as part of the broader policy for promoting economic and social cohesion (EU, 2011). The project targeted neighbourhoods in extreme deprivation, in which the solutions were to be found at grassroots levels, through inclusion of local citizens in development and implementation phases. The programs were mostly financed through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF),<sup>2</sup> which equally aimed at strengthening economic and social cohesion in the EU by correcting imbalances between its regions. More recently, the bottom-up policy initiatives, such as the Acquis Urban, the Leipzig Charter, and the Toledo Declaration firmly incorporated the concepts of “partnership” and “integrated approach” into local, national, and European urban policy (Schlappa, 2015).

Although the importance of collaborative approaches to deal with urban decline was on the increase, implementation of such strategies was associated with many challenges. While the EU policy instruments indeed supported and enabled many cities to advance bottom-up, integrated, and sustainable development approaches, it remained somewhat unclear how declining communities should have benefited from them (Schlappa, 2015). In Germany alone, twelve cities – including Leipzig – participated in each of the two URBAN programs, and their experience revealed that for the local municipalities with tight budgets in greater need of external resources, accessing the funds was not always an easy task. First, they required a sound institutional and organizational basis to get engaged in the complex tasks of lobbying and negotiation, besides project formulation and implementation (Swyngedouw, Moulaert, & Arantxa, 2002). Second, participation would often get conditioned by co-financing (Haase et al., 2013). This finally illustrated the major contradiction of the EU cohesion policy set around the growth paradigm, and the real conditions for development that often resulted from exclusion of the most affected communities. Lack of skills, access to centers of power, or simply financial resources thus made reliance either on alternative solutions or on national policy frameworks more realistic, as was the case in the particular German context.

### **Urban decline and integrative response in East Germany**

After the reunification in the year 1990, industrial production in the cities of the former GDR went down to a third of its original level, while their economic performance has remained persistently low, accompanied by significant decreases in population. In contrast to the significant shrinkage occurring in the Eastern states, the most economically prosperous centres, like Cologne, Munich, or Hamburg, have shown a continuously growing trend since 1991 (EU, 2016; Harms, 2009). They performed as magnets for new investments and inward migration, however, at the expense of less

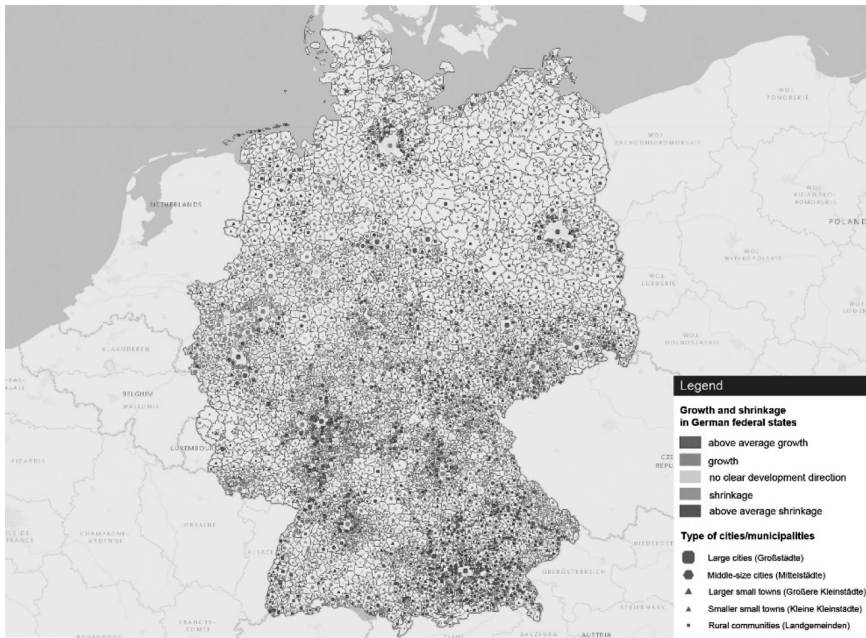


Figure 6.2 Growth and shrinkage in German federal states.

Notes: According to the database for comparative analysis of cities “Urban Audit,” out of 125 German cities – 102 from the western part and 23 from the eastern part of the country – a total of 58 experienced population loss during the monitoring period between 2006 and 2015, 14 of which from the former GDR (EU, 2016). Although since 2012 some shrinking cities in Germany experienced slight increases in population, 23 of them were on a continuous drop – 8 in the eastern part,<sup>3</sup> 8 in the former industrial Ruhr region,<sup>4</sup> and 7 in other parts of the West Germany.<sup>5</sup>

Source: (BBSR [Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning], 2014. Retrieved February 22, 2017, from <https://gis.uba.de/maps/resources/apps/bbsr/index.html?lang=de>).

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economically developed medium-order centres, most of which were located in the former GDR (Domhardt & Troeger-Weiß, 2009).

As forerunners of massive demographic and economic decline, East German cities have been under the researchers’ focus, and still represent a highly current topic in urban studies. The process of their decline since the 1990s has been characterized as a multi-dimensional demographic eclipse, associated with physical and structural processes (Gatzweiler, 2012) and causing the so-called urban perforation pattern (Daldrup, 2003; Schetke & Haase, 2008). Many researches agreed that there were three main causes for slow-burn shrinkage of cities occurring in the context of reunified Germany (Domhardt & Troeger-Weiß, 2009; Großmann et al., 2013; Kühn & Liebmann, 2012; Oswald, 2006; Schetke & Haase, 2008). First, deindustrialisation and underuse of industrial infrastructure caused a decrease in the number of

jobs that triggered the downward spiral scenario, especially affecting mono-structural industrial cities. Second, suburbanisation and urban sprawl had a significant impact as well, occurring either from the core city towards more peripheral locations of the city region, or from smaller and structurally weaker towns to economically powerful urban agglomerations. Lastly, the shrinkage also resulted from natural demographic changes, with mortality levels exceeding both fertility and immigration rates.

Stabilisation of the rapid population loss in the former GDR required simultaneous management of its growing economic, infrastructure, and social problems. Management of the perforating urban fabric was particularly challenging, due to the loss of population that caused extreme difficulties for the maintenance of urban infrastructure, in some cases even resulting in their abandonment. Deteriorating urban infrastructure further reflected on the quality of local living conditions, which contributed to massive outmigration. Equally important was the situation in which the declining number of urban populations meant not only low economic performance and consequently bad taxing opportunities, but also increasing needs for social services – all of which had direct effects on available public budgets. With lowered revenues and limited resources, local government became even more powerless to cope with the rising difficulties. As a result, development directions of East German cities largely depended on a particular set of local circumstances that required an individual approach in the formulation of proper responses. Small towns in vicinities of economically prosperous agglomerations could thus profit from the effects of suburbanization, but peripheral towns in structurally weaker rural regions faced serious consequences of demographic change. For such communities, there were no alternatives for economic (re)development, but to rely on external funding opportunities as the very last solution to cope with decline.

### *Strategic responses to urban decline in Germany*

Although local municipalities all over East Germany have previously undertaken most of the well-known strategies to oppose the deterioration trend (Eisinger, 1989), these interventions showed rather limited effects. First, rising local taxes to offset growing expenditures was considered legal in Germany only up to limited and often minor amounts. Second, downsizing public services became difficult as it contradicted municipal legal responsibilities at a certain point. Finally, vigorous engagement in economic development activities had a highly uncertain outcome and often produced additional costs without providing the required results (Bernt, 2009). In addition to these basic ways of reducing dependence on the local tax base, local governments in East Germany also aimed at shifting responsibilities towards the upper levels of government. This was technically possible because the German Federal government took concrete measures regarding the problem of extreme population loss and urban decline – contrary to the U.K. and U.S., where the



state traditionally played a less important role in urban planning. However, mobilization of taxing power of the federal state through a system of inter-governmental grants was not a guarantee for success. Federal allocations did not provide a total compensation for economic and population losses because fiscal equalizations were calculated on the basis of population figures (Bernt, 2009). For municipalities that have lost population, this meant loss of resources as well. Alternative solutions were necessary, however, they also needed to take into consideration that in both cases of reliance on either national or supranational levels, there was a risk of obtaining a form of dependency, in which cities could become driven by political and planning directives negotiated elsewhere (Bernt, 2009; Großmann, Beauregard, Dewar, & Haase, 2012). In order to avoid as many unfortunate governance scenarios as possible, the access to German federal funds was strategically conditioned. Drawing the parallel with the integrating framework for collaborative governance as defined by Emerson et al. (2012, p. 6), the national policy in Germany provided a “system context” based on subsidy programs, aiming to motivate affected communities to set a collaborative governance regime at the local level. Collaborative dynamics established through local efforts therefore became of crucial importance for reaching the objectives of the federal policy to make a desired impact.

The integrated approach to urban regeneration in Germany advocated for inclusion of a variety of important development aspects – such as social, economic, and ecological – through several programs. Initiated in 1999, the “Social City” program (*Soziale Stadt*) was the first major step to tackle both physical and social rehabilitation at the same time. The government aimed to support municipalities caught up in long-term decline through provision of important investments, prioritizing neither competitiveness nor growth any longer (BMUB, 2014). Instead, it was based on the principle of enhancing the capacity of local actors to deal with the immediate socio-economic and environmental problems resulting from decline. This complex task required an integrated approach that enforced close collaboration at different levels between various departments and administrative levels.<sup>6</sup> Until the end of the program in 2011, there were 715 interventions to resist social and spatial marginalization in 418 cities and municipalities (BMUB, 2013).

Shortly after the launch of the “Social City” program, a broader political answer to demographic shrinkage appeared in the form of the seven-years action program, “Urban Restructuring East” (*Stadtumbau Ost, 2001–2009*). As a successor of the former traditional renewal initiatives, the program was jointly directed by the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building, and Urban Affairs along with six East German Federal States; it had a significant budget and offered quite comfortable funding conditions. Led by the idea of housing market consolidation, the *Stadtumbau Ost* program aimed at establishing a more optimal balance between housing demand and housing supply. However, the strategy had much broader focus spanning from upgrading old buildings, over valuable quarters, finally to the whole inner-city areas. Its main objectives were to contribute to future viability of municipalities,

stabilize structural deterioration and social erosion of the affected districts, preserve buildings in the urban centers, and, finally, improve attractiveness of East German municipalities from both residential and economic perspectives.<sup>7</sup> Participation in the program would ensure provision of subsidies for a variety of urban development projects, which made it highly attractive for many municipalities to participate, including Leipzig and Dresden. Until 2014, the program secured 1.48 billion euros through the Federal Government to support urban development measures in 483 municipalities from the eastern parts of the Federation (BMUB, 2013). In ten years of the program, approximately 300,000 empty dwellings were destroyed (BMVBS, 2012; Bernt, 2009).

Considering the most important results of the *Stadtumbau Ost* program, the major shift of German policies was surely the most outstanding one. With advancements of the strategy, political and planning agendas set their aims at achieving necessary adjustments to real conditions, rather than unrealistic growth. Its equally important feature was that it supported collaboration between municipalities, citizens, and housing companies, which, as a result, intensified efforts towards partnership building in most of the participating municipalities. Formation of public-private partnerships was secured through strategic requirements, such as for comprehensive urban development plans (*integrierte Stadtentwicklungspläne*) that were supposed to be developed in collaboration between local authorities and housing enterprises, as the prerequisite for acquiring funds (BMVBS, 2012). The plans addressed the problems of vacancies and abandonment through involvement of both local administrators and local property owners to evaluate present conditions and define future development steps. This approach was supposed to enable communities to determine their policy guides according to their own priorities, which was basically a political decision in each individual case. In contrast to a well-established system context, the national policy framework still demonstrated results with varied success in practice.

In the focus of the following section are the specific cases of Leipzig and Dresden, along with their contextualization in the broader context of the former GDR, to demonstrate the major opportunities of collaborative the governance framework and its implementation challenges in dealing with urban decline.

### *Leipzig and Dresden in the context of strategic responses to decline*

As the biggest cities in the former GDR after the capital Berlin, the case of “shrinking” Dresden and Leipzig showed that struggle with urban decline was not only a matter of small and marginalized communities. Following the common scenario of rapid economic decline, Dresden was facing industrial regression and high unemployment rates that initiated significant outmigration. Coupled with decreasing birth rates, the number of its inhabitants decreased by 60,000 people in a single decade from 1989 to 1999 (Wiechmann, 2007). Also, Leipzig was for a long time one of the symbols

of urban decline, both in post-war and post-reunification Germany. After the unemployment rate reached 20% in the mid-1990s, the city was already facing rapid population decline, growing house vacancies, and underused urban infrastructure. During the early post-unification years, the federal government at first stimulated urban regeneration through new construction in both of these cities.<sup>8</sup> However, driven by the growth-oriented national investment incentives, dynamic construction only further contributed to the problem of housing and office vacancies, as well as to the advancements of suburbanization. Until the turn of the millennia, urban policies in both of the cities were not adapted to the new circumstances. Dramatically rising housing vacancies initiated intensive lobbying by the large housing companies, which finally made the problem get the public attention (Bernt et al., 2014).

Applying the concept of integrated framework for collaborative governance developed by Emerson et al. (2012), a general system context to oppose the extreme population loss and urban decline set at the federal level involved the cross-boundary dimension of collaborative governance regime, established between federal state governments, local governments, civil society, the community, and the private sector. In such a system set around a common goal to reach economic redevelopment, the local governments in both of the cities in focus played the driving role in setting the framework' regime, clearly demonstrating a number of relevant advancements. This long journey started after the federal funding program *Stadtumbau Ost* was introduced in 2001.

Considering the case of Dresden, the launch of federal initiatives finally encouraged its local government to establish the Integrated City Development Concept (*Integriertes Stadtentwicklungskonzept INSEK*) that necessarily required the involvement of collaborative action in the decision-making process. The newly designed strategic plan, developed in close cooperation with thousands of involved citizens, was no longer growth oriented, but instead envisioned a compact European city with a stable population, reduced land consumption, and an attractive urban center (Wiechmann, 2007). The prognoses were thus generally based on the premises of a stable population development, enabling nearly 6,000 housing units to get pulled down and reused as green spaces or potential sites for single-family housing. The simultaneous quest for finding alternative development directions largely followed the principle of cross-boundary governance with profound support by the government of the state of Saxony. This implied a major turn towards the legacy and potential of university education and research, which represented a solid basis for growth of high-tech regional clusters of innovative enterprises under market economic conditions (Röhl, 2000). It also enabled the constitution of the necessary "innovative milieu," linked to socioeconomic conditions and a culture of joint cooperative learning at the regional level.

Sternberg's (1995) perspective on the concept of innovative milieu implies that it could be developed "through labour mobility, input-output-relations and face-to-face contacts, which are encouraged by spatial proximity" (p. 199). Besides the utilization of local resources and synergies between local

actors, this concept also highly relies on necessary external networks and collective learning, enabling a sustained process of innovation (Camagni, 1995). However, the establishment of the innovative milieu in Dresden became successful as it comprised not only high technology, but also all sectors of the economy. Because of the strategic shift towards smart technologies, its reliance on close cooperation with officials of the state and district, and creation of an innovative milieu, the local government in Dresden has managed to attract a large number of subsidies for co-financing new industrial establishments as well as new investments. In spite of serious population losses in the surrounding regions, the region of Dresden regained growth since the 1990s, becoming one of the first in East Germany to initiate a self-enforcing path of economic development. In spite of remarkable success, such a sudden shift also implied necessary revisions of the previously defined long-term urban planning objectives that largely surpassed the concept of a compact European city with a stable population.

In contrast to this example, the local government in Leipzig never officially declared a policy that would acknowledge shrinkage. Instead, a growth-oriented strategy was followed from the very beginning, with the clear aim to attract large investors in industrial and service sectors (Rink, Couch, Haase, Krzysztofik, & Nadolu, 2014). Although an alternative plan was developed, it only briefly addressed management of a way too pessimistic scenario of decline.

Economic and urban recovery of Leipzig commenced after determined city leadership brought together a number of local stakeholders to produce strategies that emphasized urban renewal, economic development, social integration, and environmental reclamation. This strategic approach was supposed to attract vital funds from the German federal government and the EU. Both demolitions of excessive buildings and urban restructuring were carried out through the integrated strategy (*Stadtentwicklungsplan*; German abbreviation STEP), enacted in the year 2000 (Stadt Leipzig, 2000). The plan was drafted during a comprehensive, interdisciplinary procedure of the so-called “inter-departmental integrated management handling” (Stadt Leipzig, 2009, p. 67) that required two years of participatory efforts of local stakeholders, experts, and public input. Besides concrete steps towards consolidation of the housing market through demolition and refurbishment, the main objectives of the plan have also considered renovation and rehabilitation of the main qualities of the city center, establishment of a new hierarchy of the urban center, as well as an increase of competitiveness of the selected key areas. The plan also laid out large green areas at the site of urban perforations, supported temporary use of private green spaces, and promoted integrated neighbourhood development strategies, while the local government subsidized the acquisition of owner-occupied flats in listed historic buildings. Besides, due to large public subsidies, the local government in Leipzig managed to attract investments from a range of international players and important urban mega events, which finally triggered significant population and economic increases. After quite satisfactory results, the forthcoming

edition of the plan from 2009 foresaw neither demolition measures, nor addressed shrinkage any longer.

Considering the major outcomes, the initiatives in Dresden and Leipzig could be considered as generally successful in coping with the problem of decline in East Germany. However, there were also some less favourable outcomes to be determined. The most evident was the lack of an appropriate forward-looking approach to manage the forthcoming sudden regrowth (Čamprag, 2018). The deficiency of comprehensive and long-term considerations of possible scenarios resulted in a significant shortage in schools and kindergartens, necessary adaptations of transport infrastructure, or inefficient wastewater disposal to satisfy the growing needs. Furthermore, restructuring of the social makeup along with the ongoing physical fragmentation of the urban fabric also triggered the sudden rise of the demand for affordable housing, which came, ironically, after years of demolishing excessive housing stock (MDR Sachsen, 2017).

The issue of rising demand for housing was particularly emphasized in Leipzig. The city officials thus advocated for strategic cooperation with all the actors with potential interest, from self-organized groups to powerful entrepreneurs. The responsibilities for successful management of this issue were divided between many stakeholders, including the city-owned housing construction company LWB (Wohnungsbaugesellschaft LWB), several housing cooperatives, as well as the network for housing projects “Netzwerk Leipziger Freiheit,” founded by the city of Leipzig to strengthen the integrative approach towards finding solutions (Sauerwein, 2017). Within the frame of this specific network of various construction groups, the stakeholders with common interests were given the freedom to determine their own interventions, including the particular decisions about whether to construct new buildings or renovate existing ones. In spite of such an innovative and inclusive approach to the issue, the provision of affordable housing remained highly dependent on market rules. This raised the question whether the newly adopted role of the city administration in consulting and coordination services could be considered effective in achieving desired results while navigating potential pitfalls. However, conversely, the freedom in decision-making that the construction groups gained also raised questions regarding selective historic preservation, and all the potential consequences that the phenomenon could have, namely increasing urban fragmentation resulting from upgrading and renewal running next to dilapidation and vacancies.

The smart and well-intended strategic approach coming from the federal level to deal with urban decline in other cities of the former GDR equally demonstrated some vulnerabilities, with many difficulties associated with its implementation. First, their outcomes largely failed to address a great diversity of implications of the declining phenomenon. Considering that derelict housing had extraordinary visibility in cities, the strategic frameworks were commonly based on demolition of excessive housing stock and intentions to improve open spaces and recreational areas that would allow cities to

recover and attract new population and investments (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012; Oswalt, 2006). The resources were almost exclusively granted in relation to managing housing stock, while other aims had less relevance. More than 270 municipalities thus adapted their planning schemes to meet these criteria (Bernt, 2009). Demolition of vacant buildings thus largely became the prime urban development goal, often failing to address the specific local constellation of problems, but rather aiming at the provision of necessary federal funds. Second, the task of demolition and upgrading on the local level itself proved to be extremely difficult to achieve in cases of big numbers of owners involved. The problem of lack of ownerships in unrenovated multi-storey buildings in the inner-city areas was equally problematic, as well as situations in which owners refused to sell their property for a low price out of speculative reasons. Third, these initiatives were also highly costly, and some cities remained unable to apply for federal funds, as they couldn't afford to co-finance the upgrading measures. The final result of the federal strategic frameworks to deal with urban decline in different communities of East Germany could therefore be primarily characterized by the one-sided focus and extreme variations of their success rates. These features represent a solid ground for the following evaluation of the overall performance of collaborative governance in Germany.

### **Collaborative efforts as strategic response: from path dependency to new development perspectives**

Many authors argued that collaborative action in the form of partnerships between public, private, and civic sectors could be a reasonable instrument in urban development and revitalisation strategies. While demonstrating significant potential for finding innovative and inclusive approaches, such collaborations in the former GDR also demonstrated vulnerability and some undesired effects in practice. First, partnerships between the public and private sector generally showed that they were particularly unstable and short lasting. On the one hand, they would adopt a rather artificial character, which made the special scope of partnerships often get fragmented towards far-reaching reductions in planning options (Bernt, 2009). On the other hand, instead of anticipated collaborative efforts to define a common strategic framework for action, an agreement between many stakeholders on policy priorities was extremely difficult to reach, even including the decision which neighbourhoods should be preserved (Glock & Häußermann, 2004). Second, collaboration and proper development of integrated plans was a matter of resources, both financial as well as in competent staff. Many municipalities had difficulties properly designing plans on their own, as they were either poor or understaffed. It often resulted with other, more powerful actors taking over support of the process, which was critical as they often had particular interests in the plans realization (Bernt et al., 2014; Glock & Häußermann, 2004). Finally, as the general shift from government

to governance imposed various dilemmas for success of participatory planning in general, it also got reflected in the context of East German cities. These were, according to Feuerbach (2010), heavy dependency of the local initiatives on external findings, community organizations having limited influence that depended on their institutionalization, and demographic and socioeconomic homogenization of the affected neighbourhoods that made empowering the local residents rather difficult. All these general outcomes largely opposed one of the major prerequisites for establishing successful collaborative action in clearly defined, shared goals and operating rationale for taking action, as suggested by Emerson et al. (2012, p. 17).

There are several particular reasons for many communities in East Germany to face difficulties with institutional change towards the creation of new development paths that need to be highlighted. The most remarkable example is in the phenomenon that Liebmann and Kuder named “institutional path dependency” (Liebmann & Kuder, 2012). Such communities suffered from a general lack of strategies that could initiate alternative approaches to regeneration, and thus help overcome problems associated with historically grounded directives. A large number of cities even avoided setting up new development paths as long as possible. The reasons for this should not only be found in a long tradition of unquestioned singular development orientation, but also in the high costs of path change, additional investments necessary to establish conditions for a new start, as well as in the persistence of industrial mentality among old industrial elite and workers (Kühn, 2008; Liebmann & Kuder, 2012). Although many strategies turned out to be unsuccessful due to the strong local egoism (Domhardt & Troeger-Weiß, 2009) and deeply rooted path dependencies (Liebmann & Kuder, 2012), the equally important reason was that local partnerships for urban regeneration in German cities were generally carried out with a lack of tradition and experience in the field (Frießecke, 2007). Comprehensive and hardly predictable effects associated with the phenomenon were another significant challenge for successful implementation of advanced collaborative strategies to oppose urban decline.

Strategic approaches adopted in Dresden and Leipzig showed urban development patterns characterized by legitimation through the political system and a rather consequent imposition of integrated development concepts. Although system context was the same, collaboration dynamics set by the local governments was actually not based on the same regimes. In both of the cases, the regimes were set by the integrated urban development strategies, showing plenty of diversities – from the approaches to urban decline, to the adopted theories of action, to the share of stakeholders. Nevertheless, both were subordinated to changes and updates depending on the nature and level of impacts resulting from their joint actions, which, according to a proposition by Emerson et al. (2012, p. 19), leads towards a more sustainability over time. The case of Dresden particularly supports this claim, demonstrating that in the face of a greater uncertainty of future developments, flexibility of a strategy is even more important than its consistence. This

further builds up on the argument of Emerson et al. (2012, p. 5) regarding the driver of uncertainty and its importance in setting up direction for collaborative governance regimes, as well as of interdependence through cross-boundary cooperation that in Dresden included both federal and state support, as well as the adopted strategy having regional resonance. On the other hand, Leipzig, on its way to regrowth, demonstrated the importance of the strategic vision and initial determination of the local government, but also reminded one of the necessity of long-term planning objectives for managed regrowth. This case particularly emphasized the importance of leadership as the essential driver for collaborative governance (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 5), since the local government in Leipzig never officially abandoned the growth-oriented objectives.

Although many achievements in Dresden and Leipzig resulted from collaborative governance efforts, their success also heavily depended on generally favorable circumstances that also involved a high potential for reliance on development alternatives. This could explain relatively quickly achieved regrowth, although a coherent urban development strategy that would comprehensively address the problem has never been fully achieved in both of the cities. Lobbying of the most powerful actors gathered around real-estate business and banking interests made the issue of shrinkage get tackled primarily as a housing problem, while other issues were less privileged and addressed with slower progress. This largely contradicts the propositions suggested by Emerson et al. (2012), particularly the ones recommending shared motivation to sustain principle engagement; stressing the importance of collaborative identification of shared theories of action; and relating targeted outcomes with shared theory of action. Besides from some success, local governance in both of the cities thus also demonstrated challenges in defining and managing shared goals and stakeholders' participation to foster the ideal of collaborative approach in its full capacity. This provides evidence that although collaborative governance could be considered as an important tool to strategically combat urban decline, it is far from being a panacea for its many implications.

After nearly two decades since the first federal initiatives to oppose the shrinking trend in the former GDR have appeared, prosperous West German cities like Munich, Frankfurt, or Hamburg are still far ahead of the national average. However, compared to other East German cities, Leipzig and Dresden demonstrated significant progress (Bontje, 2004; Liebmann & Kuder, 2012; Wiechmann, 2007). Also, cities like Potsdam, Jena, or Erfurt, with more or less success, found their ways out of the post-socialist and post-industrial pasts, in which collaborative development strategies based on either historic or alternative potentials, such as culture or research, had a significant role. Many other East German communities still have difficulties with institutional change towards the creation of new development paths, which illustrates high polarization in Germany remaining a bitter reality. It resulted from a variety of local conditions, as well as the fact that economic



performance of a large number of cities in East Germany has been based on singular orientation. In times of crisis and economic difficulties, such firm dependencies on former development paths often got under a heavy influence of powerful and conservative local actors. Unevenly distributed across participants, the power thus “can enable or disable subsequent agreements or collective courses of action” (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 11). Strong commercial-industrial development paths additionally restricted both mobilisation and performance of innovative collaborative efforts. Especially vulnerable were peripheral locations, which have been under continuous and significant shrinkage, mostly due to either loss of significance as administrative or service centre, or simply as less attractive residential places. In such cases, communities failed adequately or on time collaboratively to formulate replies to deindustrialization processes on the local level – neither through innovative growth-oriented strategies, nor through the ones to manage shrinkage. Continuous loss of population and prosperity, along with a generally low alternative potential for development, classified cities like Gera, Magdeburg, Cottbus, or Hoyerswerda in the “loser cities” category, where decline even turned into a permanent state (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2006; Glock & Häußermann, 2004; Kühn & Liebmann, 2012). Referring to Emerson et al. (2012), these communities failed to “generate a new capacity for joint action that did not exist before and sustain or grow that capacity for the duration of the shared purpose” (p. 14). This finally provides evidence that the form of collaborative governance adopted in Germany to address the phenomenon of decline strongly depended on both capabilities and resources of affected localities.

### Conclusion and final remarks

Shortly after the launch of the *Soziale Stadt* program, the new federal states in reunified Germany responded with the collaborative establishment of urban restructuring policies that aimed at revitalizing city centers and dealing with deconstructions and conversions in large housing areas. The strategies that followed, such as *Stadtumbau Ost*, further promoted the integrated citywide urban development approach, which became a precondition for funding the demolition of abandoned or unused buildings. Nevertheless, even such elaborated strategic policies were not able to change patterns of uneven development and disadvantage in each and every case, especially among smaller cities and communities losing the race for regional competitive advantage (Haase, Rink, & Grossmann, 2016; Pallagst et al., 2011; Schlappa, 2016). It turned out that public-private partnerships established under such conditions were severely complicated endeavors, and that local politics remained more dependent on national government resources than on private investments (Bernt, 2009). Glock and Häußermann (2004), in their analysis of policy implementation at the local level, even questioned the overall legitimacy of public interventions, due to implementation of

demolitions at the expense of upgrading measures, as well as with their focus being far too narrowly set on housing market issues.

Following the common points of criticism of the initiatives in Germany in the academic literature so far, this study demonstrated that, first, managing urban decline is generally not an easy mission, neither on national nor on local governance levels. It often required unpopular reformulations of growth-oriented policies to ones that acknowledge decline, and a disparity that called for regional thinking but required responses embedded in particular localities. Furthermore, demands for the redefinition of perspectives to urban decline implied the development of innovative, flexible, and integrative solutions, but also finding more suitable and sustainable ways of their implementation at the local level. Second, the major governmental programs based on collaborative efforts in Germany have demonstrated similar challenges in praxis. Besides exclusively growth-oriented strategies that required reformulation, they mostly regarded the slowly changing negative connotation of shrinkage in urban development contexts, a number of small and economically weak communities in need of extensive support, and difficulties with predicting future population dynamics. Third, many problems in praxis of this well-intended and somewhat idealistic approach were usually in proportion to the number of involved interests and actors having varying degrees of power. The tradition of singular development orientation, along with a general lack of experience for proper set of collaborative frameworks to deal with the complexity of urban decline, often reflected on the capacities of local governments' adaptability to rapidly developing conditions. Finally, the success rate of collaborative, cross-boundary governance established in the cities of the former GDR strongly depended on both capabilities and resources of affected localities. Although the strategic frameworks have set common requirements for accessing the national government resources, they have generally failed to address significant disparities in development alternatives among the affected communities.

The outcomes of this study provide some important perspectives for other cities and regions facing similar challenges to reach economic redevelopment. The strategic frameworks based on collaborative action and cross-boundary cooperation in declining communities confirmed that the major challenge for ensuring successful implementation generally rests upon finding mechanisms to reconcile significant local disparities in the system context. Equally important is to balance power relations in the process of setting up shared goals and operating rationale for taking action. Finally, efficient and sustainable collaborative governance should also necessarily aim at reaching beyond its required prerequisite of reaching stakeholders' consensus. Such farsighted objectives should also consider anticipation of outcomes or some future trends on which successful implementation of development strategies may depend, even in cases when carrying out a public purpose would involve presently less desired or seemingly contradictory interventions.

## Notes

- 1 According to the official statistics, during the period between 2008 and 2012 there were 117 regions in the EU where the population fell by more than 8.0 per thousand inhabitants on average (Eurostat, 2014). European database for comparative analysis of EU cities “Urban Audit,” revealed that out of 950 large and medium-sized cities in 30 EU countries, 328 (35%) lost population in the period between 2006 and 2015 (EU, 2016). Much bigger number of cities, however, had significant fluctuations throughout the same period. Although the situation seems to be slightly improving, the biggest current loss of population still occurs in the cities of Central and Eastern Europe (Dijkstra, 2014), where 110 out of a total of 154 cities shrank (mostly in Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary), including the Baltic countries of the former Soviet Bloc (Latvia, Lithuania). Population loss could be traced in other parts of Europe as well, such as in decreasing rural areas in the southern countries of the continent, in Western European declining industrial agglomerations, as well as to peripheral areas in Northern Europe.
- 2 Projects Website: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/erdf/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/erdf/)
- 3 Frankfurt an der Oder, Brandenburg, Neubrandenburg, Gorlitz, Dessau, Gera, Cottbus and Zwickau.
- 4 Moers, Bochum, Iserlohn, Duisburg, Oberhausen, Recklinghausen, Bottrop and Witten.
- 5 Mulheim, Saarbrücken, Esslingen and Neckar, Wilhelmshaven, Celle, Schweinfurt and Hildesheim.
- 6 On the national level, the collaboration was established between several ministries: the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Housing, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Social Affairs (Vranken, 2007). Responsible for the program implementation was the Federal Ministry of Housing, which also worked in close cooperation with departments at the level of federal states in charge of housing, economy, and social affairs.
- 7 Concerning the fact that shrinking was not only affecting eastern states, only a few years after the *Stadtumbau Ost* another program was launched. “Urban Restructuring West” (*Stadtumbau West*, 2004-2015) was addressing cities and municipalities in the Western part of the country that faced economic and demographic changes. The program supported 496 municipalities. Until the end of 2015, around 846 million euros of federal financial assistance was spent for different urban measures. Common for both programs was the integrated urban development approach, as a prerequisite for successful urban redevelopment initiative (BMUB, 2015).
- 8 In the period between 1991 and 2012, 182.2 million euros was invested in the Leipzig redevelopment areas from the Federal program of Urban Renewal (Stadt Leipzig, 2017).

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