

Shrinking Cities and Immigration Challenges & Opportunities

Contact

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Studying Immigration and Shrinking Cities: Why and How?

Research Problem

In the past years, more and more **mayors** in the United States and Europe have expressed **plans to revitalize** their **shrinking cities** by **welcoming refugees**. However, is it really that simple?

With **increasing spatial inequalities** (on the urban scale and beyond), **rising numbers of refugees**, and **polarizing attitudes on immigration**, the dissertation aims at analyzing the **challenges and opportunities specific to shrinking cities** in welcoming refugees.

Research has thus far focused on the study of immigrants and larger cities. **Immigration in smaller and shrinking cities** is **understudied**. Answers to the questions surrounding the role of immigrants in revitalizing shrinking cities must go **beyond** their potential **demographic impacts**, focus on the social processes at the local scale, and **consider** the **individual levels** of both forced migrants *and* inhabitants (Hollander 2018).

The dissertation will borrow from several authors and their theories to build a **theoretical framework that allows for an integrated analysis** of immigration and shrinking cities.

Theoretical Assumptions

The potentials for forced migrants to be driving actors in the revitalization of shrinking cities and shrinking cities as “Sanctuary cities” has to be analyzed within a framework which ...

- ▶ ... enables the analysis of shrinkage and the rise in international migration as social processes in a system in which the effects of globalization play out globally *and* locally (“glocalization”);
- ▶ ... goes beyond the distinction between “natives” and “immigrants” and its implied integration imperative while remaining aware of the possible/likely conflicts within immigration societies (including a rise of antagonistic positions, especially in places that experience economic decline);
- ▶ ... gives *all* actors in (shrinking) cities a role in shaping local politics and allows to envision participatory practices unrestricted by citizenship.

Theoretical Framework

Glocalization
Swyngedouw

Postmigrant
Society
Foroutan

Scale Theory
Brenner; Glick
Schiller/Çağlar

Right to the
City
Lefebvre

Questions, Case Studies & Methodology

Cities under Investigation

Comparative study of three small and medium-sized shrinking cities in the U.S. (Akron), France (Vierzon), and Germany (Pirmasens).



Research Questions and Discussion

- 1) Can the revitalization of shrinking cities by welcoming refugees be more than an attempt to correct demographics?
- 2) In which ways does shrinkage impact the local population in terms of economic, cultural and social livability and in which ways does it impact the lives of forced migrants in terms of their economic, cultural and social livability? In which ways do these local conditions impact social cohesion?
- 3) In which ways can planning be sensitive to the complexities of hyper-diverse societies?
- 4) Can forced migrants help revitalize shrinking cities? If so, should they?

Methodological Toolbox – Mixed Methods

Analysis of cities’ social and economic development and history of decline; Analysis of the national and local history of migration.

Meta-analysis of quantitative datasets on demographics; meta-analysis of data on attitudes

Analysis of local and national migration and integration discourses; Analysis of local discourses about and responses to decline; Analysis of local responses to immigration.

Discourse Analysis; Document Analysis; Expert Interviews

Analysis of individual attitudes towards immigration, the city’s development, and outlook on life; Analysis of individual experiences of forced migrants.

Focus groups and qualitative interviews with inhabitants

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