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The Role of Leipzig's Narrative of Shrinking

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Abstract

An important claim for the categorisation and study of shrinking cities is that the experience of governance across shrinking cities may offer an alternative to hegemonic discourses of growth. However, there are methodological problems associated with categorizing then researching shrinking cities. Two key problems are: first, the category of shrinkage hides a multiplicity of cause and effect and; second, the danger of fetishizing the city against the reality of broader urban drivers of change. It is argued that the use of planning/governance narratives is a means to addresses the methodological issues, as narratives focus us on cities as places of practice. We apply the approach to Leipzig, once shrinking but now one of Germany's fastest growing cities. We conclude that while there was a significant attempt to articulate an alternative to the imperative to grow, it remained dominant suggesting the need to develop a taxonomy of shrinking cities where only some will offer an alternative vision of 'development'.

Key words: foundational stories, Leipzig, narratives, shrinking cities, urban planning

Introduction

The shrinking city is a phenomenon that has a global reach (e.g. Richardson and Nam 2014; Martinez-Fernandez et al 2012; Pallagst *et al.* 2014a), with Oswalt and Rieniets (2006) estimating that nearly 25 percent of all cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants are experiencing population loss. While any given shrinking city might offer an important illustration of uneven growth under capitalism the categorisation of shrinking raises at least two key methodological issues, the fetishizing of the city and the reductionism of shrinkage (that shrinking cities exist as something with common characteristics). These questions link to practical questions of agency as our interpretation of the ability of actors to influence a city's future rests partly on how we understand the city. Issues of agency link us to an important justification for employing the category of the shrinking cities, namely, they might serve as an important counter to the pervasive ideology of competition that obfuscates wider restructuring processes and leads to a wasteful zero sum game (Brenner & Wachsmuth 2012). We argue that bringing together shrinking cities and work on narratives in planning/governance avoids fetishizing the city as an entity as, rather than foregrounding the shrinking city, it focuses us on the processes of city governance that will be impacted by shrinkage. The narratives approach avoids reducing all shrinking cities to a single 'type', instead emphasizing the complexity, diversity and ambiguity of shrinking both in terms of cause, effect and possible responses.

Turning to the first of the methodological problems, does a category of shrinkage fetishize the city, or put another way, is the city a meaningful scale/entity through which to address the problems of decline? There is no standard definition for the shrinking city, but the dominant focus is typically if not exclusively on population loss which is problematic (Bernt 2015). In response to the ongoing struggle for a joint definition, Sousa and Pinho (2015) combine the different attempts by characterizing shrinking cities as, "[a] global, structural, and multidimensional phenomenon concomitant with visible declining population, declining economy and declining national or international importance (alone or combined), which can affect regions, metropolitan areas, cities, or just parts of them" (15). This expanding spatial definition feeds into the argument of Merrifield (2013) that the attempt to categorize the shrinking city is simply one of many instances such as the "endless city, …100-mile city, global

city, mega-city, arrival city, indistinguishable city" (210-211) that tacitly recognize Lefebvre's focus on the urban while still privileging the city as an object for study. In seeking to reconcile the city and the urban Wachsmuth (2014) argues we should, "treat the city as a category of practice, as a representation of people's relationship to urbanization processes, rather than an as a category of analysis adequate to describe these processes themselves" (87). From this perspective policymakers are not, "unable or unwilling to comprehend the definitional complexities of the city [...]. Rather, [...] nuance and complexity are traded for a targeted claimsmaking on urban resources" (Lauermann 2016: 77-78).

Focusing on the city as a category of practice highlights a second methodological problem with the categorisation of the shrinking city. Establishing a subset of cities that are shrinking tells us little about how significant actors in any particular city can and will respond. There are multiple, diverse and interrelated causes of urban decline and so shrinkage is a symptom with many causes and consequences. Shrinkage in some cities is prompted by economic impacts of globalisation leading to new urban hierarchies (Pallagst *et al.* 2014a). In other cases, structural changes in political or economic systems, particularly deindustrialisation, are the main drivers. In Europe, the shift to a post-Fordist economy, and in Eastern Europe to a post-socialist economy, are the most common causes of shrinkage (Cunningham-Sabot *et al.* 2014; Bontje 2005). Specifically in Eastern Europe, work-related out-migration after the collapse of socialist systems is recognized as an influential driving force of decline. Such migration was triggered when during the political transformation period large-scale privatization and deindustrialization took place (Bontje 2005; Glock and Häußermann 2004; Schetke and Haase 2008). Furthermore, especially in East Germany the decline of urban cores was accelerated by suburbanisation (Couch *et al.* 2005; Nuissl and Rink 2005) and a sharp decrease of fertility rates after 1990 (Steinführer and Haase 2007; Glock and Häußermann 2004).

Not only are the causes of shrinkage manifold; so too are the spatial, economic, social and environmental effects for the city. This diversity of causes, responses and outcomes, has led some to question the usefulness of the shrinking city as an object of study as scholars apply different definitions to make their case fit the shrinking city category raising the question of whether these cities can usefully be brought together (Bernt 2015; Mace 2014). Therefore,

simply to be a shrinking city does not mean that there are readily transferable lessons (in terms of cause, effect or response), as the experience of shrinkage is context specific (Pallagst et al 2014). From this it follows that, to some extent, local determination/practice will vary according to cause and context. Recognizing these two key issues Bernt (2015) argues that rather than assuming shrinking to be a singular condition occurring in multiple cities, we instead should focus on the specificity of any given shrinking city, including its relationship to other places and tiers of governance and so regard shrinkage as a sub-theme within the practice of city governance. We show here that one effective way of achieving a focus on governance and the specificity of a shrinking city is by drawing on the narratives of governance or 'governance stories' (Bevir & Rhodes 2006).

Using the case of Leipzig, we argue that a narrative based approach offers a useful means to address the methodological issues discussed, providing insight into the governance of cities that are shrinking without assuming that this will be a common experience. In particular we focus on the extent to which the experience of Leipzig, traced through narratives, indicates the development of alternatives to growth-orientated discourses. Given our respective professional and academic backgrounds we focus on planners/planning but only as a way into the wider process of city governance. Planners are not necessarily the main generators of narratives of the city but they often stand at the intersection where different interest groups, and narratives, meet. Moreover, land use planning is one tangible means by which narratives are turned into policy at the city level. As Beauregard (2007:5) argues, it is much more difficult to construct narratives of shrinkage rather than growth given the 'precarious circumstances' that those in declining cities may be in. Even where authorities are able to plan for shrinkage to do so carries risk as it can lead to stigmatisation. One approach is to look to positive data/outcomes from shrinkage, for example, Delken (2008) shows that life satisfaction in shrinking cities appears to be comparatively high. Another approach is to challenge the mainly negative characterization of shrinkage that for Sousa and Pinho (2015), "carries the negative weight of a symptom of an undesirable disease" (13). This observation leads them to call for the adaption of planning theory and practice that recognizes growth and shrinkage as "visions for development" (28) to advance from its negative connotation. This reflects the adoption of terminology such as 'smart decline'

(Pallagst and Wiechmann 2005; Hollander and Németh 2011). In the face of such negative perceptions of shrinkage can we identify effective counter narratives?

We develop these points using the following structure. In the following section we outline how narratives have been conceptualised and employed to describe urban governance including planning and how planners describe using narratives. Next, we set out the background to the research, necessary detail of the case study city of Leipzig and the methods used. After this we detail two dominant narratives, the city's foundational story and the shrinking/liveable city narrative. The latter was supported by two sub-narratives, 'courageous city of change' and 'heritage' which, we argue, were ambiguous in their effect. Ultimately these were important in informing future orientated actions in the city that were contrary to the shrinking narrative. In the concluding section we return to the reasons for taking a narrative approach to shrinking cities and what this approach, applied to Leipzig, suggests about the shrinking city as a category that might offer alternatives to growth orientated models.

Narratives

Narrative is subject to differing definitions (see Jensen 2007 for a outline), but where a key difference is usefully highlighted by the distinction sometimes made between narrative and story. While a narrow definition of narrative suggests an account of events, a story is differentiated by the addition of a plot that produces a "meaningful whole" (Czarniawska 2004:7 cited in Jensen 2007: 216). At least implicitly, a plot adds causality and possibly a moral element and a purpose. The distinction between narrative and story is sometimes set aside by employing the idea of 'emplotted narratives' (Jensen 2007: 216), and in this article this is the approach taken as we draw on the idea of foundational stories and narratives but where both are seen to encompass plots. Two particularly powerful characteristics of narratives is first, their ability to simplify and so to make sense of complex situations and the events leading to them (Gonzáles 2006: 840). This is particularly pertinent in a shrinking city as decline creates great uncertainty for local policymakers (Pallagst *et al.* 2014b), and narratives can potentially guide politicians, planners and residents by seeming to reduce complexity and uncertainty. This simplification

includes the provision of causal links (an aspect of plot), that explains why things happen. Also, through a similar mechanism, they shape the way we imagine the future of a place (van Hulst 2012; Mandelbaum 2000; Throgmorton 1996), including through the imagining of, "alternative futures" Flyvbjerg (1998:8). The link between the future orientated work of both narratives and planning is reflected by Moody (1997: 596) who, in reviewing Throgmorton's work, highlights that, "…planning in this view involves competing attempts to construct a story about the future that persuades multiple audiences and responds to other stories". In other words, planning constructs "histories of the future" (Mandelbaum 2000: 143; cited in Walter 2013).

Narratives, as persuasive and constitutive storytelling can act as a "catalyst for change" (Sandercock 2003: 18), as the successful story/emplotted narrative,

> […] integrates knowledge of what happened with an understanding of why it happened and a sense of what it means to us. Stories organize knowledge around our need to act and our moral concerns. The stories do not have to be original, but they must be authoritative (that is, provide reliable evidence marshalled into a convincing argument). The best are both original and authoritative

Sandercock 2003: 19.

That to be successful a story/emplotted narrative should be authoritative hints at the exercise of power through the practice of representation, leading to an argumentative turn in the understanding of the role of narratives (Fischer and Forester 1993). Forester (1993), drawing on the research of language and argumentation, accentuates the influence of stories in explaining power relations in policy discourses and concludes that stories do work by organizing facts:

> […] in these [deliberative] stories the planners not only present facts and express opinions and emotions, they also reconstruct selectively what the problems at hand really are. And they characterize themselves (and others) as willing to act in certain ways or not, as concerned with *these* issues […]" (ibid: 196; emphasis in original).

There are not, then, single narratives of place as different groups will represent themselves and others, their place and other places differently. In the case of planning narratives Bulkens *et al.* (2014) show that formal planning processes can be destabilized by community/ bottom-up narratives.

Narratives operate alongside discourses, while narratives offer explanations and tell of possible futures, these options are formulated within the parameters of discourses that 'structure meaning systems' (Jensen 2007: 219). In the context of this research, discourses include a hegemonic growth imperative (Harvey 1989) leaving little space for city managers and citizens to imagine much less articulate an alternative. However, Foucault focuses on the temporal aspect of discourse, with the concept of the *episteme* indicating that hegemonic knowledge can change over time (Foucault 1972). Might, in combination, narratives of decline provide a challenge to growth-orientated discourses? In order to answer this question definitively we would have to study discourses of shrinkage and their effect in multiple cities. Here we offer a starting point, an example of using narratives to capture both the bespoke experience of the governance of shrinkage but also to ask if there is evidence of a challenge to the discourses of growth.

The case of Leipzig

Leipzig's population peaked in 1930 at 718,200, making it the fifth most populous city in Germany at that time. During the Second World War the city lost about 20 percent of its population. After rising to 617,000 in 1950, Leipzig gradually lost population. In 1988, one year before the Berlin Wall fell, the population had shrunk to 545,307. The collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1989 saw the subsequent and dramatic loss of industry and steep rise in unemployment from 23,371 in 1990 to 48,368 in 2000 (Wiechmann *et al.* 2014: 132). In the decade after reunification, Leipzig encountered the highest population loss of any East German city (Glock and Häußermann 2004; Rink *et al.* 2010), plummeting by 18 percent, a loss of nearly 100,000 inhabitants. Labour-oriented migration to West German cities was largely

responsible for population loss during the immediate years after reunification. Later, commuter-friendly subsidies and lack of modern housing in the city led to immense suburbanisation echoing the experience of American shrinking cities (Howe et al 1998). Suburbanisation, in combination with a sharp decline in fertility rates, contributed to the continuing decline in population (Schmidt *et al.* 2005; Goldstein *et al.* 2009). In total, Leipzig lost approximately 39 percent of its population from the 1960s to the late 1990s (Wiechmann *et al.* 2014). A marked increase in population in 1998 and 1999 of 56,000 was due to the annexation of surrounding towns, an option not so readily available to shrinking cities in some other nations (Howe et al 1998). Between 2000 and 2011, the population rose marginally from 493,208 to 502,979. In those years, growth concentrated on a few districts while many buildings remained unfurnished, and flats remained vacant. García-Zamor (2012: 79) calls this development the "Leipzig paradox" - a situation in which the city was both growing and shrinking at the same time. This paradox is hardly unique to Leipzig, being repeated in Manchester and Liverpool in the UK and with examples from the global south in the literature too (see Ganapati 2014 for the case of some Indian cities). A drop in Leipzig's population in 2011 is explained by adjusted Census data, after which there has been a steep population increase of about 10,000 inhabitants per year. However, Kauffmann (2015: 11) reminds us that adjusting the data by subtracting the population gain through the annexations, Leipzig still had a population deficit of minus 4.6 percent in 2013 compared to 1990, while having expanded its administrative borders by four percent.

We outline three phases in urban policy in Leipzig after reunification. From 1990 – 1998, there was an emphasis on physical regeneration and large infrastructure projects such as the newly built fairground, the airport extension and the rehabilitated train station. Two-thirds of the historic *Gründerzeit*[1] buildings (75,000 flats) were restored through private and public investments (City of Leipzig 2003). Simultaneously, more than 30,000 flats were built at the city's fringes and surrounding towns between 1990 and 2000. But after nearly a decade of large-scale restoration efforts, in parallel about 100,000 inhabitants left the city. There is no precise date for when shrinkage became an adopted[2] narrative in Leipzig, the reviewed literature indicates that the process of acknowledging shrinkage started sometime in the late 1990s. We identify 1998 to 2011 as approximately the time in which Leipzig adopted the narrative of shrinkage[3]. During this

phase there was a strong focus on the excess of housing in the city. In 2002, 17 percent (55,000) of the flats in the city were vacant, out of which 27,000 were located in non-refurbished *Gründerzeit* housing stock (Heinig and Wießner 2005). The focus on 'surplus' housing was a prevalent part of Leipzig's story of shrinkage (Bernt et al 2014), consequently, planners in collaboration with politicians, external experts, and residents began to elaborate ideas on how to deal with this. The third phase started in 2012[4] with accelerating in-migration; our focus is on the second phase when the city was known as a shrinking city.

Methods

The original research was carried out for a dissertation (Volgmann 2015), on which this article builds. Here we differently conceptualise the theoretical issues related to shrinking cities. This leads us to focus on the significance of the ambiguity of the narratives and, consequently, to develop a new set of conclusions. In employing narratives, one approach would have been to build on the argumentative term to look at the alternative narratives in and of a place to understand flows of power by tracing which came to have the greatest purchase (Jensen 2007; Holman 2014). The research took a different approach, as confronted with the contemporary growth of the 'shrinking city' of Leipzig, the 'adopted narratives' of the shrinking city phase are traced (ie those that had already come to dominate the agenda). This was done to understand the relationship of these dominant narratives to broader discourses orientated to growth. We are aware that in our focus on the ambiguous nature of the narratives we are offering our own narrative, which; "restates the philosophical analysis of political science as interpretations of interpretations" (Bevir & Rhodes 2006:20). However, this is not to accept that employing narratives demands a relativist position as we can evaluate different narratives by comparing them with one another "using reasonable criteria" (Bevir & Rhodes 2006:28). We seek to objectively evaluate Leipzig's narratives using the following criteria: consistency with accepting shrinkage (can we track narratives of shrinkage into policy) and consistency with other narratives/policies and actions. Influenced by Walter's framework for narrative analysis of municipal plans (Walter 2013: 70), in both phases of interpreting the fieldwork narratives were derived through the construction of different pieces of more or less coherent stories contained in the interviews and documents. We analysed planning documents and official publications of the City of Leipzig, such as the *Beiträge zur Stadtentwicklung (Blaue Reihe)* as well as brochures and

leaflets of the city's planning office. Eckstein (2003) points out that planners primarily provide space for stories of others, but they may also arrange stories and do not incorporate all those existing. In this regard, we follow Walter's (2013: 59) assertion that planning documents are not the, "idiosyncratic idea of one planner or politician" but widely accepted at least in municipal policy circles. Hence, we consider planning documents as "crafted processes" in which particular actors may have a very strong influence (Gonzáles 2006: 853).

After the initial review of policy and associated documents seven semi-structured interviews were completed with key planners from the Office of Urban Planning, the Office of Urban Renewal and Housing, the Department of Strategic Urban Development, a former Deputy Mayor of Urban Development and a freelance planner. Some of the interviewees are still working for the city administration while others have changed their positions or retired. All interviewees had been working in Leipzig for at least eight years, some since 1990 (Figure 1). Because of their different roles and periods of employment the interviewees have varying perspectives on the case study. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. The objective was to identify stories told by the actors to understand better how planners, as part of the process of city governance, give meaning to shrinkage. The criteria for selecting the interviewees were the position they held in Leipzig and their long-term engagement with planning in the city. Thus, although a relatively small sample they share considerable expert knowledge and experience of the city. It is acknowledged that the way interviewees frame and narrate past situations might have changed – consciously or unconsciously – as the timeframe of the research goes back up to approximately two decades.

<INSERT FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE>

The narratives

In this section we outline four narratives identified through interviews and analysis of documentation. In outlining each we focus in particular on how they influenced practice in the city. We start with two core narratives, the 'proud trade city' and the 'shrinking' narrative of the liveable city. We then move on to two further narratives 'preserving heritage' and 'courageous

city'. Although interviewees discussed the latter two as sub narratives supportive of shrinkage/ liveability, at the end of the section we argue that they were more ambiguous.

A proud trade city

Cities often have a uniting "foundational story", a mytho-poetic story of origins that builds on the history of the place and achievements of the past and is told by different actors (Sandercock 2003: 17). The value of a foundational story is to connect different narratives and unite the narrators and to do so it needs to be told by different actors. Reflecting this, Leipzig's foundational story was told in six out of the seven interviews and is often referred to in planning documents. Also planners who arrived as newcomers to Leipzig adopted the city's foundational story. In this account, Leipzig is described as a formerly successful trade city once one of the richest cities in Germany (around 1900[5]). The foundational narrative also entails references to Leipzig as a 'book city' and a 'music city' referencing the city's publishing houses and renowned composers (Interviewees 1;2;5). But the foundational narrative does not simply invoke a past without any connection to or influence on the present. The way in which the foundational story knits together the past and present is usefully elaborated by the palimpsest metaphor that has been adopted by numerous disciplines including architecture and geography (Dillon 2005). Referencing a surface repeatedly written on, erased and re-written, the city can be seen as a place constantly re-written through demolition and rebuilding. Or, in the case of extreme shrinking, a city written then erased. However, the act of erasing the palimpsest is never complete, traces of previous writings remain, the past is never fully erased but becomes intertwined with the present, and where "[the] 'palimpsestuous' describes the structure with which one is presented as a result of that process, and the *subsequent reappearance of the underlying script*" (Dillon 2005: 245, emphasis added). This is reflective of calls for an anti-essentialist approach to the city concentrated not on what they inherently are (*pace* Scott & Storper 2014), but rather as sites within which people act and which are the product of "historical processes" (Bernt 2015). Whether through the metaphysical, including institutional memory and city pride, or the physical including infrastructure and buildings, the past is present in the present.

The palimpsestuous focuses us not on the veracity of the narratives in Leipzig but on the way in which narratives of the past have had practical contemporary effects on the governance of Leipzig during the 'shrinking city' phase. The foundational story was clearly reflected in the immediate post-unification period when a growth orientated strategy was pursued. The approach in Leipzig was to develop large-scale projects to build its way out of shrinkage and regain its status with clear links between the strategy and its past as a successful trade city. In the 1990s, the construction of a new fairground (trade fair), and the extension of the airport are examples alongside the delivery of substantial quantities of new housing. The effects of the (employment) growth policy ran into the later phase when shrinking (particularly linked to the housing stock), was a dominant narrative. In 2001 BMW announced its choice of Leipzig to site a new factory (opened in 2005) and in 2004 DHL announced its intention to build a new European distribution centre, responding to the expanded airport. In 2003 the city was also awarded preferred bidder status for the 2012 Olympics but was eliminated from shortlisting a year later. However, in the short term the employment led growth strategy based on historic 'assets' failed to stem Leipzig's population and housing decline leading to the 1998-2011 period of planning for shrinkage.

Becoming a liveable city (shrinking)

Once shrinkage was openly discussed (City of Leipzig 2002; Doehler-Behzadi *et al*. 2005), the need for a response was presented as self-evident by most of the interviewees, for example, "It was clear that this [post unification housing] development must not continue, we had to do something about it" (Interviewee 5). A policy of shrinkage was developed through a liveable city narrative that reflected housing as a core problem. Interviewees identified two main effects of the oversupply of housing (e.g. Interviewees 1;2;5; City of Leipzig 2003): first, a crisis of the housing industry as refurbished flats remained vacant and; second, an unpleasant living environment for residents. Several interviewees highlighted a strong metaphor that was coined by the Head of Department of Urban Renewal and Housing, describing the large amount of surplus housing: "the structural dress of the city had become too large". The then Deputy Mayor for Urban Development identified patches of decaying or empty spaces throughout Leipzig as the "perforation of the city" (Lütke Daldrup 2001). The situation was framed as posing a chance

to reduce "historic deficits" (particularly from the GDR period) in favour of sustainable urban regeneration (City of Leipzig 2003: 24; Interviewee 5). To counter the "grey and miserable" situation of Leipzig (Interviewee 5), the city was to be made more attractive for residents from the suburbs while preserving the qualities of the city (City of Leipzig 2005b).

In 2000, with the strategy "*Neue Gründerzeit*" (literally: "New Founder Epoch") Leipzig formulated a policy of seeking to create family-friendly advantages of suburban life in the urban setting; more green infrastructure, lower density, and higher levels of individuality of housing (City of Leipzig 2002; 2005b). Referencing GDR period high density districts at the urban fringes, official publications stated that "these times are fortunately over", thus portraying the liveable city narrative as representing a radical break with the past (City of Leipzig 2005b: 2) and so a new approach to the city's future. One interviewee pointed out that the "free space provided a creative leeway" (Interviewee 5). Leipzig embraced population loss as a chance to provide quality of life and improve social welfare (García-Zamor 2012: 80). An innovative yet contested approach was townhouses (*Stadthäuser*): newly-built owner-occupied semi-detached housing in central quarters to fill gaps between historic buildings and to compete with the suburbs through offering the qualities of a suburban house in a city location (City of Leipzig 2005b; Bartezky 2015). This approach was subsequently supported through the Self-User-Programme that shifted its focus from the promotion of historic buildings to town houses. The new approach represented a challenge to the planning orthodoxy, as planners and other stakeholders argued for "a coherent debate without prejudices [that] questions the retrospective cliché of the compact European city as the only sustainable urban form" (Doehler-Behzadi *et al*. 2005: 75). Moreover, while it may have many other advantages, the compact city has been linked to the growth imperative; it can be a way for developers to increase profitability and is sometimes a route to gentrification (Gunder 2006). While developers did not want to densify Leipzig at the time the challenge to the compact city model implied a challenge to the interests of developers when these are linked to densification.

Preserving our heritage
The heritage sub-narrative put the historic *Gründerzeit* buildings in the frame. These are closely associated with Leipzig's image of a trade city, representing Leipzig's wealth at the end of the

nineteenth century. These deteriorated housing blocks became the image of a city neglected by the socialist government (e.g. Interviewee 1). Interviewees repeatedly praised the great amounts of private and public capital invested in restoring these buildings in the 1990s. However, the local housing market crisis driven by an excess of flats, meant that private investment dried up as banks would not grant loans for further refurbishment efforts. Not only were non-refurbished flats vacant, but refurbished flats could not be rented out anymore (Interviewee 3). The remaining non-refurbished houses were threatened as it became unprofitable for owners to invest (e.g. Interviewee 1). Yet the *Gründerzeit* buildings were also seen early on as an important contributor to the city's future, even as the 'shrinkage' narrative was being adopted there was an increase of population in the *Gründerzeit* quarters (Interviewee 3). The liveable city policy responded with new planning guidance to "preserve as much as possible" while simultaneously allowing "as much reconstruction as necessary" (City of Leipzig 2003: 11). At the turn of the millennium, the great challenge was the refurbishment "the last third": the remaining 30 percent of non-restored historic buildings as many feared the loss of much of it due to deterioration (Interviewee 4).

The challenge of finding new alternatives to preserve the remaining buildings was partly met through a joint effort with residents, private sector and government (City of Leipzig 2003). An initiative of the non-profit organisation *HausHalten e.V.*, saw the development of the guardian houses concept (*Wächterhäuser*), which was implemented in December 2004. It focused on empty, non-refurbished historic buildings. The organisation facilitated contracts between owners and respective users with a limited duration of five to seven years. Through these agreements, guardian houses are partly inhabited by the "guard" and other social groups, preventing vandalism and further decay. Under this system of "innovative mothballing" (Interviewee 2), the inhabitants pay no rent but must cover additional costs such as communal service charges. There are currently 16 guardian houses in Leipzig. A second civil society approach to the preservation of heritage was the so-called Self-User Programme (*Selbstnutzer-Programm*). It aimed at promoting the acquisition of affordable property for young people by organizing owner groups. The programme made use of the low property prices, especially for historic buildings. The objective was to stop out-migration and strengthen historic quarters by supporting owner-

occupancy (García-Zamor 2012). In sum, guardian houses aimed at finding a temporary solution for decaying historical buildings while the Self-User Programme promoted owner-occupancy at affordable rates to "save" historic buildings. Both approaches are informal and private though strongly supported by the city and incorporated into official publications.

Courageous city of change

The depth of the crisis was linked to a failure to act previously, "private investments were made for so long because the topic of shrinkage, the forthcoming collapse of the city, had not been communicated in the 90s" (Interviewee 2). Given this and that significant change was not inevitable, the second sub-narrative spoke to an inherent potential to accept and enact major change. This sub-narrative was significant for its ability to bring together a wide range of parties including through its depiction of the particular characteristics of the citizenry. In 1989, Leipzig had been the centre of protests that provided for a transformation of the political system. Interviewees often referred to Leipzig's historic role as a city promoting freedom and justice (eg Interviewee 2). This has links back to the foundational story which describes Leipzig as having been a trade and industrial city as opposed to the local rival city of Dresden which is considered the more conformist 'royal town' (Interviewees 1;2;4;6). An important affect of this narrative was the participation of inhabitants alongside other stakeholders in joint problem solving; sometimes referred to as the "Leipzig Model", conveying consensual decision-making and cross-political leadership (García-Zamor 2012; Interviewee 1).

The empty and non-refurbished buildings in combination with empty sites (from demolition) had led to a severe deterioration of the urban environment and were consequently characterised as two of the immediate challenges requiring a change of approach (City of Leipzig 2002). An example of the outcome was the use of the federally administered Urban Restructuring East programme *(Stadtumbau Ost)* that was implemented from 2002-2009 and initially designed to support the physical rehabilitation of East German cities. In Leipzig this was "rededicated" with the funds used for the creation of green spaces following demolition of vacant housing (Interviewee 5). Identity and purpose was given to underused spaces by labelling them, the green connections branding conveyed an image of change and liveability with the intention

being to "accentuate the interface of the city and the landscape" (City of Leipzig 2003: 29). The funds were used to mitigate the financial loss of demolition for the real estate associations and convince stakeholders to follow the envisaged transformation. The initial objective was to abolish 30,000 vacant flats by 2010 although only 12,830 vacant flats had been demolished by 2012, of which 3,451 were in historic buildings and 9,379 in GDR period apartment buildings (City of Leipzig 2014). More radical debates evolved around the demolition of entire districts at the fringes although these plans were not entirely put in practice (Interviewee 5). This approach broke with one of the dominant paradigms of the 1990s: to refurbish old houses, and represents an outcome from the narrative of 'courageous city' narrative that came to influence the federal government, which adjusted its funding framework subsequently and officially supported the destruction of housing followed by redesigning the vacant space.

Two other examples of how the narrative produced partnerships focused on new approaches include: first, the so-called "Pact of Sanity" (*Pakt der Vernunft*) between the city and the seven largest local housing associations. The agreement ensured that the housing associations supported the approach of demolition. Second, the plan for the Leipzig East neighbourhood (City of Leipzig: 2003: 28) saw the development and use of "authorization agreements" (*Gestattungsvereinbarungen*), an informal tool developed to transform a temporarily underutilised private property into public use while building rights were left with the owner (Heck & Will 2007). The change of land-use was designed to be short-term with a duration of about ten years with property tax abatement as one incentive (Rall and Haase 2011). Moreover, the owner could attain up to 100 percent of the cost for demolition (City of Leipzig 2003: 41).

<INSERT FIGURE TWO ABOUT HERE>

Ambiguity of narratives

For interviewees, reflecting on narratives in Leipzig in the 'shrinking period', it was evident they were important in supporting collaboration between all the main actors such as local politicians, heads of city departments, local housing associations and influential civil society groups. They were important in establishing support for a 'common interest' of real estate companies and

stakeholders and the public that was considered to be vital. The joining up of stakeholders under a common set of narratives was perceived, for example, to have increased capacity to lobby the state and the federal government and was likely a factor in influencing the federal government to adjust its funding framework after Leipzig articulated a united narrative of selective demolition. There is, as shown, evidence that narratives of liveability, heritage and courage did produce policies to enact a non-growth orientated future for the city. The challenge to 'standard' practices such as rethinking the compact city, included articulating the idea of a perforated city in the context of shrinkage and also, procedurally, deep engagement with residents and other stakeholders. But if the liveable city narrative clearly anticipated a downsizing of the city then the growth orientated foundation story appears to have been the more effective in the long run. The uses of the past play out differently across shrinking cities but will feed into a choice between one of two future oriented narratives; that shrinkage is permanent or that it is a temporary phenomenon and the city will return to growth. Manchester from the 1980's through to the early 2000s is a well-recorded example of 'going for growth' (Deas and Ward 2002, Mace et al 2007). Or alternatively, that shrinkage is permanent requiring a resizing of the city as its population will remain smaller for the foreseeable future, for example: Youngstown, US (see Rhodes and Russo 2013); Kitakyushu, Japan, and; Leipzig. However, in Leipzig's case we see a gap between the adoption of the shrinking narrative and related polices and the outcome.

Here, the two other narratives, 'heritage' and 'courageous city' were important in their ambiguity, in whether they lent more support to the liveability/shrinking narrative or the growth logic of the foundational story. The *Gründerzeit* buildings brought together the foundational story and the liveable city/shrinking narrative in an ambiguous manner, as the *Gründerzeit* buildings spoke of the historic status of the city – of what had been and could yet still be. More significant was the 'courageous city' sub-narrative. For the interviewees, the residents' desire to get involved, unbowed post unification (Interviewees 2;5;6), had an entrepreneurial character harking back to the foundational story. The then Mayor of Leipzig described the involvement of citizens as "the biggest trump" for Leipzig's future (Tiefensee 2005: 6). The 'courageous city' narrative brought together numerous parties but in combination with the foundational story it was an ambiguous narrative. If a city's population united with the administration and other

stakeholders could be courageous enough to shrink could this partnership also be audacious enough to go for growth?

The logic of growth was supported by other events. The city had lost population throughout much of the twentieth century but by the time it adopted the shrinking city moniker it was starting to gain population, albeit from a very low historical base and initially due to annexation of some suburbs. Moreover, despite criticism of the growth agenda in the immediate post-unification phase, the pro-growth employment policies, which drew their logic from the foundational story, had something of a life of their own after being set in train. Attracting in the likes of BMW and DHL flowed from the earlier actions (the airport expansion – DHL) that demanded an ongoing commitment and often investment by the city authorities into the shrinking period. This has led some to retrospectively describe the city government as "thinking big" (Power et al 2010: 116) in terms of growing the city – of never really embracing shrinking as a long-term strategy. However, this is a retrospective appraisal where the narratives tell of a different story at the time.

Conclusions

Interest in shrinking cities, nearly two decades old now, has seen a maturing argument that questions the shrinking city as an object of study. It has been argued that the narrative approach addresses two methodological problems. First, it avoids reducing all shrinking cities to a single category when the current focus of the literature is to emphasize the incredible complexity and diversity of shrinking both in terms of the causes, effects and possible responses. Rather than foregrounding the shrinking city it allows us instead to regard shrinkage as an element, albeit an important one, that impacts city governance. Second, while narratives tell a story of a city as an identifiable entity, as a bounded place they can and do accommodate an urban perspective; that is, narratives include a relational element, they provide accounts of a city's place within a wider urban space and produce accounts of how the city is impacted by and impacts on other locations and can incorporate a temporal element. The implication of this is to approach the experience of and responses to shrinkage as bespoke in the first instance and not flowing from a singular experience of shrinking; however, commonalities may arise. One of the existing justifications for employing the category is that responses to shrinking might provide a challenge growth

orientated discourses, to the imperative constantly to compete with other cities. A large number of studies of different shrinking cities using a narrative approach might look to identify and compare narratives and subsequent policies that were important in developing successful approaches to shrinkage.

Here we have applied the approach to Leipzig where we identified two core narratives, the foundational story and the liveable city with the former containing the logic of pursuing growth/competition and the latter downsizing. Two further narratives, 'heritage' and 'courage to change' appeared as sub-narratives in support of the liveable city. However, we have shown here that these were ambiguous in how they might and did influence actions in the city. Combined with the continued effects of the push for growth immediately post-unification the sub-narratives also worked in support of the foundational story with its logic of growth. The effect that we see in Leipzig was twofold. We have outlined the impacts of narratives that represented a sustained attempt to rethink the imperative to grow. The shrinking period focused on low/no demand housing in the city and produced attempts to reimagine the city with a permanently smaller population. The shrinking narrative allowed planners to reinterpret compact city norms by selectively creating a less dense urban form and allowing for more green in order to compete with suburbanisation that had been a drain on Leipzig's population (notwithstanding the expansion of the city's jurisdiction into the suburbs). However, many growth-orientated policies were followed including direct competition with other cities, for example when bidding for the BMW factory. Our case of Leipzig indicates the strength of the growth imperative. Narratives of shrinking produced innovative policies in the city but counter narratives informed more standard policies of growth and competition. We are not suggesting that Leipzig's return to growth is in some way a failure of policy, but it makes pursuing permanent downsizing, in the face of already negative perceptions, even harder for other cities.

Returning to our methodological concerns with the shrinking city, a narrative approach offers a useful insight into city governance in the context of shrinkage and could, with further examples, produce a taxonomy of shrinking cities and where we might identify a class of successful

approaches to downsize cities. A taxonomy might include a city's historical position in the urban hierarchy; for example that Leipzig and Manchester are distinct from Youngstown and Kitakyushu in terms of their 'historical' resources. This does not mean that a city is entitled to a historical position but it suggests that how historical claims influence future orientated policy in shrinking cities is worth further attention. A taxonomy should also focus us on the importance of the national setting for 'claimsmaking'. In Leipzig local actors were able to draw on the shrinking city and 'courageous city' narratives to articulate a unified claim for recourses, and the federal government offered significant financial support to Leipzig as one of a series of shrinking cities (Bernt 2009). While the city scale is important for generating 'claimsmaking', claims are met beyond the city, which emphasises the importance of context. Had the federal government not had the political will and resources outcomes in Leipzig would most likely have been very different, it could not have managed shrinking in the way it did nor could it have pursued its parallel growth agenda of expanded infrastructure and competitive bids. In this scenario Leipzig would more likely have come to be grouped with Youngstown as a permanently 'resized' city rather than with Manchester a fellow ex-shrinking city. Understanding shrinking at the city level matters, but it is not enough.

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[1] An economic phase in the 19th century that was accompanied by the prominent architectural style of historicism and left its architectural legacy in Leipzig.

[2] We use the term 'adopted' to emphasize city actors taking up the shrinking city narrative as federal intervention focused on shrinking cities was external to the city in its origins. In 2000 the federal government established a commission on housing market problems and between 2002-2009 the Federal Government also underwrote the *Stadtumbau Ost programme.*

[3] There is no precise way to date this. In 1995 the so called "Raumbeobachtungssystem" (spatial monitoring system) was set up to monitor empty houses & flats and their geographic location but was initially just an initiative by the planning department. The literature refers to the 'shrinking phase' starting in the late 1990s. Two of our interviewees (5,6) dated it to 1997/98.

[4] The transformation from shrinkage to growth was gradual and we judge that 2011 marks the latest date of the adopted narrative of shrinkage.

[5] We note that the depiction as trade city is not the sole but most frequently mentioned attribute of Leipzig's past. Other accounts that can be linked to the city's foundational narrative is the mention of Leipzig's historical importance as 'book city' (many publishing houses were/ are based in Leipzig), and as a music city (referring to several famous composers who lived in Leipzig).

Figure One: Interviewee details

	Position	Relevance
Interviewee 1	Freelance planner, Bürogemeinschaft Gauly & Heck bgh.	In Leipzig since 1998
Interviewee 2	Head of Department Urban Renewal West at the Office for Urban Regeneration and Residential Development	In Leipzig since 2007, previously in consultancy industry dealing with Leipzig
Interviewee 3	Head of the Office for Urban Regeneration and Residential Development	In Leipzig since 1991
Interviewee 4	Head of Department Urban Development Planning in the Office of Urban Planning	In Leipzig since 1997
Interviewee 5	Urban Planner, Head of Office of Urban Planning	In Leipzig since 1991 (retired in 2011)
Interviewee 6	Head of Division, Urban Development Policy, BBSR,, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB)	2002 – 2004 Head of the Olympic Planning Unit Former Head of Department Urban Development Planning at the Office of Urban Planning
Interviewee 7	Director of Research and Managing Director at the German Institute of Urban Affairs [*Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik – Difu*]	In Leipzig from 2006 – 2013, Deputy Mayor of Urban Development

Figure 2: Evaluation of identified narratives

Narrative	Supporting Actors	Policy Approaches	Ideas about Development	Impact of Narrative
Proud trade city (Foundation story).	Local politicians & planners; inhabitants & newcomers; local businesses.	New infrastructure; international sports events.	The city should regain its place in the historic hierarchy of cities; it should build on historic economic potential; marketing; urban entrepreneurialism; reaction to shrinkage.	Joint narrative that is circulated by various groups. Powerful to organize support for large-scale projects as it draws on identification with the city and creates pride. Originally criticized for large investments (e.g. fair ground construction).
Becoming a liveable city (shrinking).	Local politicians & planners; inhabitants; local businesses.	See sub-narratives below.	Shrinkage as chance to reduce "historic deficits"; city is in competition with suburbs; planning can improve quality of life (QoL) and give incentives for repopulation; adaption to shrinkage.	Unites politicians, planners, society and local economy around a desirable development: to become a liveable place.
Preserving our heritage.	Civil society organizations; historic monument protection authority.	Guardian houses; Self-User Programme; conservation regulations.	Shrinkage as threat to heritage; planning can be a threat (e.g. demolition); shrinkage can offer chances to enhance QoL for lower-income groups; adaption to shrinkage.	75% of historic buildings were already restored by late 1990s. City does not prioritize heritage protection anymore.
Courageous city of change.	Local politicians & planners; real estate companies; community & local businesses; academia; external actors.	Public participation; demolition; authorization agreements; town houses.	Shrinkage demands radical solutions; shrinkage encourages innovation in urban development; local participation as important resource; stakeholder agreement.	Unites politicians, planners and real estate companies. Participation "sold" as characteristic of Leipzig. Supported by state, federal and EU programmes. Narratives influenced funding framework to allow for demolition.