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Changing Urban Geographies of Growth and Decline

Abstract

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Peripheralisation and Decline of Cities

The debate on urban shrinkage refers to the problem of population and job losses in an increasing number of cities. Deindustrialisation, suburbanisation and birth deficits are seen as the most important causes of demographic and economic shrinkage. Yet there are few theoretical approaches, which examine the relationship between political decision-making and decline of cities. The author introduces the conceptual framework of “peripheralisation” as an explanatory approach to urban shrinkage. It refers to the “making” of peripheries by taking socio-economical and political processes into consideration. For this purpose, three main processes are distinguished: 1. out-migration of inhabitants, 2. disconnection to innovation dynamics and infrastructure networks, 3. dependence on economical and political centres of command and control. These processes can be seen complementary to the increasing centralisation of immigrants, gateways and headquarters in metropolitan areas and capital cities. The concept is based on a dynamic understanding of centres and peripheries. Referring to the IRS research project “City careers in peripherised regions” (2009-2011) the paper gives an overview of socio-spatial peripheralisation processes in Germany and strategies in medium-sized cities to cope with migration, disconnection and dependence. Finally, the author discusses to what extent the approach of peripheralisation is able to explain urban shrinkage within the context of uneven spatial development.

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