

Shrinkage in Portugal: A concern or a hidden word?

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The research conducted, and presented in this paper, aims to assess whether and how existing Portuguese land use and development policies align with findings which demonstrate patterns of population decrease and shrinkage in Portugal. First, based on a literature review, we identify the consequences of population decrease, which roughly constitute the characteristics of shrinkage in the absence of adaptive planning intervention. Second, we review several macro level policy documents to assess the global level of awareness and understanding of the issue of shrinkage. Then, we briefly look at dominant approaches, and strategies in place as well as recommendations made on this topic.

Finally, a content analysis is applied to spatial planning instruments of selected cities, which include Lisbon and Oporto, not before sketching a national and regional frame of reference on shrinkage. The concept of shrinkage, or shrinking cities, is not explicitly mentioned in any of the Portuguese planning policy documents or in any of the spatial planning instruments documents analyzed. This is partly understandable because it is an emergent phenomenon in Portugal, in comparison with other countries, and because the concept is recent and it has not yet transpired from planning theory into practice. The remaining part is explained by the doctrine of growth. In sum, despite evidence of population decrease in Portugal, spatial planning instruments and policy documents have either a disavowal or reactive character pertaining population decrease and shrinkage.

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