Shrinking Cities through a Cultural Kaleidoscope:

How Participatory Culture Drives Collaborative Governance?

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by

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CHAPTERS

This thesis is based on the three articles that are reprinted from the following publications:

Chapter 2

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Chapter 3

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Chapter 4

Matyushkina, A., le Borgne, S., & Matoga, A. (2023). Overcoming the limitations to co-production in shrinking cities: Insights from Latvia, France, and the Netherlands. European Planning Studies, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2023.2207600

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1. Motivation for this study

What do we think of when we think about culture in cities? We might think of Bilbao or Graz with their iconic architectural buildings of the Guggenheim Museum and the Kunsthaus that contain magnificent collections of fine art. Or we might think of Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate sculpture, located at an elegantly designed public space in Chicago; or any other artistic installation in a city we have recently visited. Some might think of the inspiring ambience around the creative quarters where designers and artists generate new ideas, while tourists stroll around the shops, galleries, cafés, and restaurants with international street food or high cuisine. These examples are what we often notice in cities as urban culture. These cases drive urban attractiveness and place cities on international tourist maps. They help to lure international investments that reboot the urban economy and attract the desired type of residents such as international highly educated youth. These functions of culture as a marketing tool and economic engine have been discovered in the 1970^{s} – 1980^{s} in post-industrial cities like Liverpool, Bilbao and Manchester that were hit by industrial crisis, followed by the economic and demographic decline; but needed the revival (Bianchini & Parkinson, 1993). The successful cases of culture-led regeneration that bring economic growth and prosperity back to the declining cities proliferated to such extent that politicians, urban planners and local governments of declining cities aspire to apply those models to repeat the success.

However, traditional pro-growth models, such as 'creative city' and 'flagship development', have evoked heated debates regarding both their economic efficiency and social sustainability. Critical studies indicate that such strategies often result in socio-spatial segregation, gentrification, and cultural homogenization, as well as reinforcing the "vicious circle" of urban decline (De Franz, 2013; Grodach, 2010; Lin & Hsing, 2009; Pastak & Kährik, 2017; Rousseau, 2009; Seo, 2002; Zukin, 1995). Additionally, the shrinking cities scholars argue that re-growth should not be the destiny of all shrinking cities (Hollander & Németh, 2011; Pallagst & Wiechmann, 2005). De-growth, post-growth, or smart shrinkage discourses are slowly but steadily entering the mindsets of policymakers, practitioners, and communities. What is the value of culture in cities other than being the economic and marketing tool for urban growth? Can we find urban culture outside of theaters, museums, and creative quarters? Where can we find this 'outside' culture? Does it exist in shrinking cities? How does urban culture manifest itself in shrinking cities? And what meaning does culture have for governments, residents, and artists in shrinking cities? These questions have puzzled me from the beginning of my PhD journey. I was curious to look at culture in shrinking cities as a black box that I could unpack, to understand its role and meaning in shrinking cities. I hope that my work can contribute, even in a small way, to promoting the value of culture in governance of shrinking cities, which I unveil further in my research.

In the title of the thesis, I propose the metaphor of culture as 'kaleidoscope'. I use this metaphor because it figuratively suggests that by tapping into the cultural domain, shrinking cities can approach the difficult governance situations with a new angle. Just as looking through the lens of a kaleidoscope that shows ever-changing arrangements, delving into the cultural domain can bring new creative collaborations into the sight of shrinking cities' governments. The kaleidoscope, with its ever-changing lights, colors, and various shapes, represents the limitless views, opportunities, and the release of creativity that, I argue, culture brings to governance practices in shrinking cities.

1.2. Research aim and thesis outline

In this thesis, I aim to explore the interplay between governance and culture in a bidirectional manner: 1) the governance of culture in shrinking cities and 2) the role of culture in the governance of shrinking cities. These two focuses are interdependent. First, this thesis aims to explore the governance process around cultural strategies, which address urban challenges triggered by urban shrinkage. To do so, I follow the three foundational questions that Le Galès and Vitale (2013) suggest any research on governance should start with. When I relate these questions to my topic, they are as follows: (1) What is governed through culture in shrinking cities? (2) How culture is governed (including whose culture is governed)? (3) Who governs culture in shrinking cities, or who governs 'the ungoverned' (meaning who governs culture 'beyond the gaze of governing agencies or institutions' (Raco & Brill, 2022, p. 11)? It is particularly interesting to address these questions by focusing on the cultural sector – one of the most 'marginalized' policy sectors in shrinking cities.

Second, while trying to understand who governs culture in shrinking cities and how, I aim to unpack the "black box" of culture and its role for different actors who utilize it in shrinking cities. I focus particularly on the role of culture for local governments and strategic planners. Thus, I aim to develop practical recommendations for the local governments of shrinking cities on how culture can be used for transformative change in governance approaches towards a more democratic, inclusive, and self-reliant city.

The answers to these questions reveal the structural vulnerability of the cultural sector in shrinking cities, which manifests in the declining capacities and resources of local governments and the increasing reliance on non-governmental actors to maintain the cultural sphere. The results also highlight the fundamental role of governance networks in maintaining cultural services in shrinking cities and the high value of culture for forming such networks. The decision to focus on the two contrasting case studies – Riga and Oberhausen – proves useful as they illustrate the different structures of governance modes with diverse interdependencies between the actors.

This thesis is based on three articles published in three academic journals. Each article is a complete piece in itself: it has its own research question, literature review, methods, and results. Due to this structure as a collection of independent articles, this PhD thesis does not aim to offer a comprehensive overview of the role of culture in shrinking cities but rather concentrates on the most compelling processes within the subject matter, which are documented in the papers.

The outline of the thesis is as follows. In the remainder of **the first chapter**, I continue with a general reflection on my research strategy. I focus on the interpretative approach and abductive reasoning—the two fundamental principles of my methodology. Following that, I provide an overarching literature review on the key concepts of this thesis: shrinking cities and governance in shrinking cities, culture, and the use of culture in shrinking cities. This review serves to set the context and provide the reader with an initial understanding of what the research will cover, creating a foundation for the more specific discussions and analyses that follow in the subsequent chapters. The literature review reveals that culture in shrinking cities has largely been utilized for economic, marketing, or physical regeneration. This existing state of knowledge highlights the need for further investigation into the role of

culture in other spheres of shrinking cities. Therefore, my thesis takes a novel approach to culture and explores its role in the urban governance of shrinking cities, specifically in forming inclusive collaborative governance networks that have the potential to produce innovative, locally-based, and socially just urban strategies. This original focus emphasizes the main novelty of my research.

In **the second chapter,** I explore the process of how governance through culture evolves. I zoom in on a single case study of Riga, Latvia. Referring to the three fundamental questions by Le Galès and Vitale, this chapter concentrates on the second one — how culture is governed in shrinking cities, but also touches upon the third one — who governs culture in shrinking cities. In this chapter, I analyze the cultural governance evolution through studying how and why the role of culture has changed from being the catalyst for economic growth towards the enabler of civic empowerment, place attachment, and governance innovations. I investigate this through document analysis of cultural and urban strategies in Riga, as well as through semi-structured interviews. I include three urban strategies in my analysis, which were in action between 2006 and 2021. I begin by understanding the process of how the first official cultural strategy in Riga developed. The first cultural strategy (published in 2008) was triggered by Riga's participation in the European Capital of Culture, and that is why this event is central to my analysis. I then move on to understanding how the role of culture changed in the second cultural strategy of Riga (published in 2017). Additionally, in parallel with the changing role of culture in the municipal cultural strategy, I analyze how the attitude of strategic planners towards culture evolved and how culture has been strategically used for the urban development of a city that lost a third of its population over the last thirty years. I document how the excess of empty spaces triggered by urban shrinkage and the economic crisis became contingent events that fostered structural change in the governance of cultural strategy toward a citizen-focused and decentralized model. In this paper, I take a stance to de-stigmatize urban shrinkage and portray is as a chance rather than a constant danger.

In **the third chapter,** I focus on the actors in the cultural domain in shrinking cities because I aim to understand who governs culture in these cities. I analyze which actors comprise collaborative governance networks; as well as how and why they do so. I focus on collaborations mediated through cultural projects. I identify the resources, challenges, as well as the goals of the main actors in cultural networks to understand how mutual dependencies are created to stimulate actors' participation in collaborative networks. This chapter primarily identifies the interdependencies between the two actors that appeared to be crucial in cultural governance networks: third-sector organizations and local governments. Third-sectors organizations include socio-cultural centers, cultural and non-cultural NGOs, as well as neighborhood community associations. The private sector actors minimally involved but do appear in the culture-led collaborative networks in shrinking cities. That is why, in this chapter, I briefly reflect on the ambivalent role they play in the cultural governance of shrinking cities (see section 3.5.3).

My previous chapters highlight that the collaborative networks for cultural development in both cities — Riga and Oberhausen — naturally developed with minimal involvement from private actors. Even though attempts were made to engage them, the external processes drove private actors away from cultural collaborative networks. In Riga, this external shock was the global economic crisis of 2014, and in Oberhausen, it was the long-term economic budget deficit, which slowly but steadily discouraged private investors from city

development. That is why, in **the fourth chapter**, I decide to concentrate on a project where a private actor is present in the collaborative network to understand how their involvement contributes to the outcomes of urban development, as well as what culture (or whose culture) is governed in this case. This paper focuses on co-production, which is a type of collaborative governance and therefore fits within the overall thesis theme. I zoom in on one specific project of co-production that spotlights the 'governance without government' (Zingale et al., 2017) network involving a private actor and a third-sector organization.

In **the fifth chapter**, I arrive at the general discussion and conclusion on the role of culture in governance of shrinking cities.

1.3. Research strategy

The process of research design involves the act of recurrent decision-making and providing an explanation for the decisions that have been made. In this section, I am reflecting on the research methodology of my entire PhD journey. However, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 contain their own methods sections, which explain how the research questions in each study were answered.

1.3.1. Allowing flexibility of research flows with abductive reasoning

Just like the process of urban planning that is not linear but iterative, my research approach carries a similar character. The central topic of this dissertation did not emerge purely from 'the literature' or 'the field' but from the constant cyclical process between reading the academic literature, engaging with 'the field', entering discussions with the supervisors and peers, writing, and thinking. That is why instead of a deductive or inductive research approach, I adhere to the 'abductive' logic of inquiry (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011). According to Jhagroe (2016), "an abductive approach lets theoretical debates and empirical experiences 'clash'. It accepts that the researcher is being 'abducted' by the puzzles, tensions, surprises, and concerns that emerge during these clashes" (p. 71). Unlike the linear inductive logic, where reasoning begins with situational observations, which lead to general explanations, or linear deductive logic, which starts with the general laws tested on specific hypotheses, abductive reasoning follows "a much more circular-spiral pattern, in which the puzzling requires an engagement with multiple pieces at once" (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011, p. 28).

Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2011) argue that abductive reasoning starts with a puzzle or a surprise, and then engages in sense-making process to see the phenomena as less surprising. According to them, the puzzle does not emerge from 'the field', but comes from the tension between the researchers' expectations (derived from their previous knowledge) and the actual observations and experiences they encounter in the field (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011). At the start of my PhD, I had a predefined topic that was developed in the grant proposal of the RE-CITY International Training Network. The topic was formulated as 'The role of culture-led regeneration in shrinking cities'. Even though I had the freedom to modify the topic to make it suitable to my interests, it significantly shaped the direction of my PhD. Taking 'culture-led regeneration' and 'shrinking cities' as the two keywords, I had delved into the literature on post-industrial cities' transformations, where culture was used as one of the main drivers of urban regeneration. The publications on the post-industrial culture-led regeneration were largely advocating for its efficiency in stimulating economic re-growth and revitalizing the built infrastructure, or they provided a critical stance on culture-led regeneration as the main cause of gentrification. I have written a summary of that literature in section 1.4.2. My literature review gave me a perspective based on the dominant narratives on culture as a 'hardware' tool in shrinking cities: as marketing the city brand, revitalizing infrastructure, and economy. At the same time, from the literature on shrinking cities, I learned that re-growth strategies are not always sustainable for shrinking cities, and there is a need to find novel governance tools to improve the quality of life for the remaining residents without focusing on re-growth. I was motivated to explore those tools and unveil what role culture can play there.

When I started conducting my first interviews in Riga (my first case study) in October 2019, I was immediately exposed to unexpected new narratives on the role of culture in urban planning. These narratives came not only from the bottom-up actors but also from urban planners and local civil servants. These narratives on culture as a tool for the empowerment of civil society and building trust between local administration and communities changed my perception of culture in the urban development of shrinking cities. It also taught me to stay open to the data that I collect in the field. I decided to drop my prejudices acquired through literature reviews and start from the very beginning: to answer foundational questions such as what culture in shrinking cities is, what it is used for, by whom it is used, and why. The field visit to Riga thus became the turning point of my understanding of culture in urban development and the turning point in my research journey.

The next time I entered the field in Riga was almost a year later, on the first of September 2020. My data collection was significantly delayed due the COVID-19 outbreak. Preparing for the field and opening to new revelations, I tried to formulate open questions that motivated my participants to reflect on the subject. I positioned my participants as creators of knowledge, as they could express their opinions without being exposed to questions based on pre-existing theoretical assumptions. I was also prepared to deviate from the interview guide and change the questions along the way. To allow for such flexibility, I selected the semi-structured format of the interviews. Reflecting on these methodological choices, I consider this method useful because I managed to tap into the theme that was not widely discussed in the literature on culture, nor on shrinking cities — the role of culture in governance.

After conducting my research in two diverse shrinking cities (the comparative design is presented in Chapter 3), I realized that when resources are limited, cultural services in shrinking cities are the least prioritized by public authorities and largely neglected by private investors, yet are essential for residents. It is implicitly evident that when financial compromises must be made, a pragmatic local government would cut cultural services to sustain the most essential services such as healthcare or social support. This 'marginalized' position of cultural affairs makes it particularly interesting to study because it enables uncovering innovative ways of governance actors' interactions in 'survival mode'. Whether culture is prioritized or neglected by public authorities, might speak about the style of governance, government's values, thus the governance regime of a particular city.

1.3.2. Interpretive research approach

My experience 'from the field' has taught me to return to the roots of understanding culture in shrinking cities. I began to see culture and its role as the black box that I needed to unpack. I focused on exploring the different meanings my research participants assigned to culture and reflected on how those meanings transformed into actions. Post facto, reflecting on how I made sense of culture in shrinking cities, I realized that I was following an interpretive approach (Bevir & Rhodes, 2015; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011; Wagenaar, 2014). According to Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2011), interpretive researcher characterizes the type of researcher that 'seek[s] to understand what a thing "is" by learning what it does, how particular people use it, in particular contexts' (p. 27).

The term 'interpretive research' means that the researcher is constantly occupied with *interpreting* the reality around them and making sense of it. Unlike a positivist-informed researcher who seeks to generate objective explanations of social phenomena, which

would be independent of the observer and free from any 'subjective' biases, an interpretive researcher does not pursue an objective truth. Instead, an interpretive urban scholar would focus on exploring diverse interpretations of urban problems and their potential solutions, studying how individuals act on these interpretations, and trying to interpret how those actions come into beings (Wolf, 2018).

Working with the notion of culture has taught me that there is no 'universal' culture. Thus, my main goal has become to understand how the people I interview make sense of it. The process by which people comprehend and make sense of culture is fundamentally composed of 'subjective' interpretations, which they derive from their own perceptions of the world. That is why the 'truth' about culture, generated through human interpretations, is perpetually a 'truth' contingent upon a specific place, time, and person's identity. There exists no ultimate and universally applicable reality upon which truth claims can be grounded. My main message here is that working with the notion of culture has directed me towards an 'interpretive approach', however, it was only post facto that I realized that the way I was conducting my research is the strategy of an interpretive scholar. This realization in the process of writing provides another example of abductive logic – through reflecting on my research path and writing about it in the introduction and conclusion chapters, I arrive at a new discovery about my methodological strategy. Hence, it is not surprising that some authors highlight the importance of the writing process as a critical methodological element (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2011).

Because I work from an intersubjective epistemological position, which means that I aim to understand the meaning-making processes and provide in-depth descriptions of urban culture and cultural processes, I do not aim for objectivity, but I try to show the world through the eyes of those I study. Because interpretative work is central to this approach, I highlight my own work in the analysis by using personal pronouns 'I' and 'my.' I also often refer to the informants' perspectives by using quotes.

1.4. Literature review

1.4.1. "Shrinking cities are here to stay."

The topic of shrinking cities has received considerable attention in academic and policy literature in recent decades. Pockets of urban shrinkage exist all over the globe. Even in one of the world's most populous countries —China—the attention to the problem of a shrinking population has been rising in recent years (He et al., 2017; Meng & Long, 2022; Wu et al., 2022). The geographical areas where the academic and policy interests in the topic of urban shrinkage have long been established include North America, Europe, Japan, and Russia. Extensive research on the phenomena of shrinking cities, their typologies, causes, and effects has been followed by a considerable amount of literature on the governance responses to shrinking cities with different types of policies (Lewis et al., 2022; Liu, 2020, 2022; Matoga, 2022), physical regeneration strategies (Schenkel, 2015), research projects (e.g., COST-Action CIRES and RE-CITY), as well as bottom-up initiatives (Gribat, 2017).

Following the downturn of traditional industrial cities, urban shrinkage has long been erroneously perceived as a temporary phenomenon, resulting in it being one of the most neglected urban phenomena. Nowadays, it has become clear that "shrinking cities are here to stay" (Besana & Böhme, 2022, p. 1) because their growth is proliferating on a global scale. The quantitative statistical study by Zhai et al. (2022) shows the increasing proliferation of shrinking areas over time. The authors' research illustrates that between 1992 and 2000, only 9% of cities worldwide were shrinking; these were primarily located in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Between 2000 and 2012, this percentage rose to 16%, and the cities were concentrated in the developed countries such as the USA, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Between 2013 and 2018, there was a notable urban shrinkage surge on a global scale, with approximately 27% of the global population residing in cities experiencing this phenomenon. During this timeframe, the geography of shrinking cities expanded to the developing countries in Africa, Latin America, and East Asia (Zhai et al., 2022). The forecasting studies present pessimistic scenarios emphasizing further exacerbation of urban shrinkage in terms of its geography and speed (Besana, 2022; Besana & Böhme, 2022). For countries in Western Europe, North America, and Canada, some studies predict worrisome trajectories (Zhai et al., 2022).

Urban shrinkage can be described as a structural phenomenon of population loss accompanied by challenges in various domains such as the economy, politics, and social sphere. Even though within the academic community there is no general agreement on the definition of urban shrinkage, its causes and effects, the population loss is generally accepted as a main indicator (Rink et al., 2010; Wiechmann & Bontje, 2015). Many scholars also agree on the main macro trends interlinked with population decline such as economic crisis, deindustrialization, suburbanization, political change, and environmental pollution (Haase et al., 2013; Reckien & Martinez-Fernandez, 2011; Wiechmann & Bontje, 2015; Wu et al., 2022). Scholars stress the complexity of interrelated processes in shrinking cities (Audirac, 2018; Haase et al., 2013; Hartt, 2018), however, they don't agree on the nature of causal relationships between the drivers and effects of urban shrinkage. For example, not all shrinking municipalities are in financial downturn. Hartt (2019) distinguished the type of prosperous shrinking city—the city that declines demographically but thrives economically.

Due to the discrepancies that exist within shrinking cities research and the lack of alignment on key concepts within the field, eschewing the tendency towards overarching generalizations is paramount, as such tendencies often engender oversimplification and superficiality, obscuring the nuanced interplay of factors that shape the course and outcomes of urban shrinkage processes. By diligently attending to the contextual particularities of urban shrinkage processes, scholarly endeavors attain a heightened level of rigor and validity, promoting a more accurate and profound comprehension of the phenomena under investigation.

1.4.2. Confronting constraints: governance challenges in shrinking cities

According to Le Galès & Vitale (2013), "modes of governance have long-term consequences for their inhabitants and governing failures may have severe negative effects" (p.1) on all spheres of residents' lives. Urban governance defines all processes that happen in cities. It refers to who decides how to plan, fund, and manage urban space, as well as what norms and rules should regulate urban processes. Urban governance entails an ongoing dynamic of negotiations and conflicts over the distribution of social and material resources, as well as political power (Ansell et al., 2020; McGuirk, 2000; Mitlin, 2008). Behind all those processes stand institutions and human beings. Thus, urban governance concerns the stakeholders and their decision-making processes over public urban affairs. In this thesis, I refer to urban governance in a broad sense as the formal and informal mechanisms, relationships, and processes, through which societies or organizations steer and coordinate their activities.

Many authors have previously identified reasons why governance of shrinking cities is a delicate matter. First of all, urban governance has little power to influence global processes and the main causes of urban shrinkage, such as globalization, deindustrialization, declining fertility rates, greying population, and outmigration (Jaroszewska & Stryjakiewicz, 2020; Oswalt, 2006). Second, dominated by decades of the economic growth paradigm, urban governance and planning lack effective tools to deal with the economic and demographic decline (Pallagst et al., 2009). Third, despite the common macro processes affecting every shrinking city across the globe, shrinking trajectories are greatly affected by the place-specific economic, institutional, and geographical arrangements, and local policy responses (Wiechmann & Bontje, 2015). This 'glocal' (Swyngedouw, 2004) nature of the shrinking phenomenon makes it challenging to develop universal 'best practice' databases.

In this section, I develop the argument that governments in shrinking cities are confronted with a specific combination of conditions that impairs their actions and requires innovative ways of governing—by building trustful long-lasting relationships with civil society. On the one hand, the governing possibilities are constrained by the declining resources and capabilities. On the other hand, social challenges in shrinking cities rise and require local governments to be innovative, creative, and sensitive to the needs of local communities. Accounting for this combination, I argue that collaborative governance is the paramount mode for shrinking cities, while culture is the binder that holds loose elements into a collaborative governance structure.

In dealing with urban decline, many scholars call for a paradigm shift away from the traditional growth-oriented discourses, where the assumption of population and economic growth is a prerequisite for prosperity. 'Smart shrinkage' is an alternative to the traditional

growth-dominating approach in urban planning. It is defined as "planning for less – fewer people, fewer buildings, fewer land uses" (Popper & Popper, 2002, p. 23). The smart shrinkage ideology focuses on the quality of life of the remaining population and does not assume that population shrinkage necessarily leads to the decline in the quality of life (Pallagst & Wiechmann, 2005). Urban shrinkage could thus provide a strategic opportunity to reimagine cities and shift towards more sustainable and just environments. As argued by Audirac (2018), reduced population, unused land, and vacant buildings are the potential spaces for ecological regeneration, cultural experimentation, and social innovations.

1.4.2.1. Rising social challenges in shrinking cities

Even though not all shrinking cities possess fewer economic resources[1] (Hartt, 2019), they do have fewer human resources due to the population decline. Declining human resources often result in fewer social resources, such as support networks that maintain social cohesion, well-being, and inclusion. It is usually the young, qualified, and educated people who tend to leave first. While some groups that cannot easily migrate, such as the elderly, those with low education and income and other vulnerabilities become the most affected by the social effects of unemployment and decreasing quality of life (Fol, 2012; Hospers, 2013). Such imbalances and the concentration of certain groups in shrinking areas lead to an accumulation of social challenges in shrinking cities.

Compared to the body of research on economic, environmental, infrastructural, and other 'hardware' planning concerns, the number of studies on the social aspects of shrinking cities is limited. Some studies, however, show that intangible qualities like social networks or social equality are sometimes even more important to the residents of declining areas than facilities and economic prosperity (Delken, 2008). In her paper, Fol describes the process of socio-spatial segregation as 'the spatial manifestation of social inequalities' (Fol, 2012). She criticizes the local strategies of French shrinking cities, which by favoring social mix, competitiveness, and attractiveness reinforce socio-spatial disparities and put the most vulnerable groups in the situation of 'captivity'. In another study, Cortese et al. (2014) investigate the phenomenon of social cohesion in shrinking cities. The authors agree with Fol (2012) that the population decline contributes to the socio-spatial segregation and jeopardizes social cohesion. Interestingly, their analysis of urban strategies in three European cities, Ostrava, Genoa, and Leipzig, did not reveal the reinforcement of socio-spatial problems. Nevertheless, the authors point out that the social cohesion policies remain in the shadow of physical and economic policies to address urban shrinkage, concluding that more attention needs to be paid to social dimensions in declining cities. Audirac (2018) researches the social consequences of spatial stigma and the policy responses to it in the United States. Again, the author notes the over-focus of urban strategies and academic research on 'hardware' planning aspects with little attention for social equity and justice. Audirac states that socio-spatial segregation may result in spatial stigmatization of degraded areas. Resulting from the dilapidated built environment, stigma is defined as 'symbolic degradation of the city'. In line with Martinez-Fernandez et al. (2016), Audirac argues that stigma affects sociocultural aspects like residents' sense of self and capacity for collective action.

[1] Although often, especially resources for the cultural domain (as both of my case studies reveal).

The processes of population and economic decline, increased unemployment and decay of the built environment might result in mental and psychological challenges for residents, such as a loss of identity and trust, as well as a low sense of civic pride and belonging (Hospers, 2013, 2014; Molotch et al, 2000 in Ročak et al., 2016b). I use the term sociocultural[2] to distinguish those consequences. The research on sociocultural consequences of urban decline on the local population is very scarce. The most significant contributions to this topic have been made by Ročak (2019; 2016b, 2016a) and Hospers (Hospers, 2013, 2014). Ročak et al. (2016b) study how citizens experience urban decline and how social capital in shrinking cities influences social sustainability. The authors find that in the situation of limited economic, spatial, and natural resources, the so-called social capital resources, such as place attachment, trust, pride, and sense of place are important for maintaining the quality of life in shrinking cities. These aspects can be challenged by a negative image caused by shrinkage, in which case culture can play a central role in regeneration policy (Ročak et al., 2016b, p. 11). Hospers (2014) discusses the 'urban mindware' of shrinking cities, by which he refers to the city image, and calls it a crucial element of the urban fabric because it discourages local empowerment and diminishes inhabitants' 'sense of self-worth' (Leo & Anderson, 2006, p. 169 in Hospers, 2014).

Other studies touch upon the sociocultural consequences of shrinking cities as results of socio-spatial and socio-economic divide, but do not elaborate further on their interlinks. For instance, in their analysis of factors that make people stay or leave Guimarães et al. (2016) identified several psychological factors that discourage inhabitants to leave a city: place attachment, residents' sense of civic pride, and social networks. To conclude, the above studies reveal that governance and policy approaches in shrinking cities are dominated by the 'hardware' concerns, while the 'software' concerns deserve less attention. The authors argue, however, that social and sociocultural aspects such as place attachment, social capital, trust in local governments and politics, and trust among local communities affect the quality of life of the remaining population in shrinking cities and might be crucial factors in their decision to remain or leave. Thus, governance approaches should focus on sustaining social networks, developing trustful relations within the communities, and helping residents better understand their surroundings.

1.4.2.2. The need for collaborative governance

Many scholars assert that the "local authorities will not be able to cope with the effects of shrinkage of their city on their own" (Stryjakiewicz & Jaroszewska, 2016, p. 34) and should involve local residents[3] and external actors in planning activities (Haase et al., 2012; Hospers, 2013; Ročak et al., 2016a; Schlappa, 2017). Additionally, the relevance of civil society for governance is emphasized by the increasing distrust towards political parties and governments that takes place in Europe (Divjak & Forbici, 2017). Engaging the civil society and other non-traditional governance actors in local governance and planning is

[2] Sociocultural consequences concern people's behavior and mental processes as shaped in part by their surrounding: how people communicate, understand, relate, and cope with one another.

[3] The disadvantages that communities experience in the context of urban shrinkage make it questionable whether civil society has the capacity to become involved in the governance of shrinkage. I focus on this question in chapter 4 of this thesis. Some scholars argue that shrinking municipalities need to work with mediators or 'brokers' between local governments and civil society (Matoga, 2022) because they "can devote sufficient time and effort to the project, establish common rules, as well as build confidence and mutual trust with the participants" (Matyushkina et al., 2023, p. 13).

referred to as the collaborative governance process. Although this theoretical concept has not been explicitly used in the literature on shrinking cities, I argue that it provides a relevant framework to analyze the opportunities of cultural initiatives in shrinking cities.

Different definitions of collaborative governance exist in the literature. The most widely used (though not ideal) definition was developed by Ansell and Gash. They define collaborative governance as:

> a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets. (Ansell & Gash, 2007, p. 544)

It draws on P. Healey's collaborative planning theory (Healey, 1997) and focuses on the consensus-oriented approach. It positions public agencies in the center of the collaboration giving them more agency to engage non-state stakeholders. However, examples of collaborative governance in the cultural sector show that the networks are not always initiated by the formal government actors, but often by cultural actors or non-governmental organizations. These actors are able to challenge the existing structures and power dynamics due to their independent position, ability for critical thinking, and knowledge of the needs of vulnerable social groups.

Additionally, the definition by Ansell and Gash (2007) excludes informality and informal urban processes from the agenda of collaborative governance. In my thesis, particularly in the second chapter, it becomes clear how some informal (but not illegal) actions by non-state stakeholders, such as occupying abandoned properties or marking them with stickers, played a role in drawing attention to the problem of shrinkage. These actions helped to initiate the transformation of cultural strategy and cultural governance towards greater accessibility, participation, and decentralization of cultural services.

Due to the limitations in Ansell and Gash's definition, I have decide to use an alternative definition of collaborative governance proposed by Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh. They define it as:

> the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished. (Emerson et al., 2012, p. 2)

By omitting references to public initiator, formal arenas, and consensus-building, this definition expands the concept of collaborative governance to include arrangements not initiated by public actors. It also encompasses informal forms of collaboration and processes that focus on challenging existing orders and effectively managing conflicts.

As shown in the previous chapter on shrinking cities, addressing shrinkage cannot be the task of a single organization because it affects many aspects of urban life, including people's social capital, the economy, the built environment, and the sense of belonging, among others. Tackling the 'wicked' problems of urban shrinkage requires multi-actor, multi-sectorial, and multi-level deliberation and decision-making, which can be achieved through collaborative governance (Bianchi et al., 2021). Collaborative governance emerges as a response to the unique challenges faced by shrinking cities for several reasons. First, it is driven by actors seeking to optimize resources. Shrinking cities typically have limited

resources, both in terms of finances and human capital. Collaborative governance allows for the pooling of resources and capacities, enabling more efficient and effective use of available resources to govern cities. This is especially important for governments facing personnel shortages due to budget deficits. For instance, my findings reveal that in Oberhausen—a shrinking city with a long-term budget deficit—the municipality hires only the minimum staff needed to fulfill the required tasks. The issue of staff shortages due to a lack of funding creates a vicious circle, as the municipality cannot hire additional personnel to strengthen its position in securing external funding, particularly from the EU.

> *What the municipality has is super low. Actually, it's almost nothing. The only hope is for EU projects. The dilemma is that I'm the only person working in one of these projects. Half-time. We need so many more people, in other, like city planning department, for instance… They have none. That's why they can't make it succeed in the EU funding competition], because it needs staff, right? It needs people*. (Interview, Oberhausen, 2022)

Second, collaborative governance arrangements develop in shrinking cities to foster flexibility, creativity, and innovations. As discussed earlier, no 'one size fits all' solutions exist in shrinking cities due to the unique combination of context-specific geographical, economic, social, and institutional conditions. Shrinking cities need to develop tailored locally embedded mechanisms that work efficiently within their specific context. Developing these innovative mechanisms requires experimentation and learning from mistakes. Experimentation demands significant financial, time, and human resources to design and test various methods that could eventually help to solve the problem. Additionally, experimentation requires a flexible mindset from local authorities, allowing them to 'waste' resources on solutions that do not guarantee assured results. Thus, engaging non-traditional actors and forming new networks among diverse stakeholders facilitates experimentation and innovative approaches to problem-solving.

Third, collaborative governance ensures communication and knowledge exchange between those who govern (in the classical sense, the local governments) and those whom the governance is directed towards (the residents). To address the sociocultural challenges mentioned above, local governments need a good understanding of local communities and territories. Municipalities require human and financial resources to collect relevant data to support planning and governance in shrinking cities. However, this possibility is restricted when municipal budgets are only sufficient to fulfil their legally required tasks, such as social care or education. Knowledge of local communities becomes essential for shrinking municipalities to govern efficiently. My findings reveal that even in economically prosperous shrinking city, such as Riga, gaining knowledge of local communities is a challenging task for local planners.

Finally, collaborative governance promotes inclusive decision-making by involving a wide range of stakeholders, ensuring that the needs and aspirations of different groups are known and taken into account. To summarize, shrinking cities face a broad range of social challenges that affect the well-being of residents. These challenges require context-specific and efficient governance tools. However, the governance of shrinking cities is restricted by a lack of human and financial resources and an impaired ability to experiment and collect relevant data for planning.

There is a knowledge gap in understanding how to develop governance collaborations in shrinking cities: how to link different departments of local municipality, attract stakeholders

with creativity and hands-on experience, as well as engage vulnerable and marginalized groups in collaborative networks. This thesis argues that culture is the glue to achieve these three aims. My goal in this thesis is to understand the collaborative governance process within the cultural domain in shrinking cities: what factors affect the development of this process and how it influences the governance of shrinking cities. I also aim to understand when the design of collaborative cultural processes does (or does *not*) bring the desired outcomes and what role culture plays in this.

1.4.3. The role of culture in shrinking cities

This section aims to unpack the concept of culture and explore its relation to human nature and the urban environment. Additionally, it seeks to investigate how the term 'culture' is used in current literature on the planning and governance of shrinking cities and whether there is an opportunity to improve the definition in order to enhance the functional use of culture in urban governance.

1.4.3.1. Defining culture

According to Raymond Williams (1985), "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (p. 3). It carries distinct meanings in different disciplines and evolves through time and history, reflecting changes in social, political, and economic contexts. The earliest meaning of culture dates back to the 15th century, when it referred to the cultivation of crops or the breeding animals (Featherstone, 1995). In the late eighteenth century, it became a noun for generalization of the 'spirit' that informed the 'whole way of life' (Williams, 1981). Today, the use of this widespread definition has proliferated to such an extent that it has become 'virtually meaningless', leading to the understanding that culture is everything (McGuigan, 2003).

Scholars in the field of cultural policy and culture-led regeneration often prefer to distance themselves from the broad anthropological definition of culture as 'the way of life' and instead refer to specific cultural elements employed in urban development. These cultural elements include tangible products such as various forms of art (architecture, design, visual art), creative industries, arts, and leisure activities, as well as intangible local artifacts like traditions or local history. Simplifying culture by reducing it to specific (often tangible) elements restricts its functional use in urban development and governance. In this thesis, I propose considering culture as a process that adds value not only to urban regeneration but also to urban governance, offering a new perspective on the actors involved in cultural initiatives.

Raymond Williams is a pivotal author in the development of the concept of culture in sociology. He distinguished four different connotations of the word "culture." The first refers to the state of mind and knowledge that a person acquires—as in a 'person of culture'. The second is the process of this development—as in 'cultural activities.' The third is the means by which this process occurs—as in 'the arts' (Williams, 1981). This distinction emphasizes the precedence of the cultural process of human development over the outcomes that result from this process, such as the arts. Indeed, culture manifests itself in products but is not limited to them. Cultural products are inert objects that do not possess creative power on their own (Bidney, 1947). These products result from the process by which individuals develop their physical and intellectual abilities and make sense of themselves. Through this

process, humans cultivate not only themselves but also their environment, leading to the creation of cultural products (ibid.). Thus, cultural products are secondary; in its primary sense, culture is a process through which humans' behavior and thought evolve to better realize their wants and needs. This logic introduces a processual aspect of culture into urban planning, which I build upon in my thesis.

To conclude, in this section, I argued that understanding culture solely as cultural artifacts presents a limited perspective on its relation to human nature and local communities, thereby restricting its functional use in urban planning and governance. In this thesis, I propose rethinking the value of culture by adopting a processual definition. A processual understanding of culture implies that culture is not confined to its aesthetic value, and people do not need to hold a certain level of education to engage with it. Instead, it positions residents themselves as the primary holders of local culture, and thus, the main experts in cultural urban processes.

1.4.3.2. Culture in urban strategies of shrinking cities

1.4.3.2.1. Traditional culture-led regeneration strategies

Culture-led regeneration first emerged in Europe as a strategy to address the consequences of urban decline following the industrial crises of the 1970s and 1980s, when many once-flourishing cities faced social deprivation, unemployment, and a decline in industrial production (Lysgård, 2012). Concurrently, national governments shifted towards neoliberal and decentralization policies, delegating fiscal, social, and political power to regional and local governments. This shift allowed local governments to develop their own strategies to tackle socio-economic decline. Culture was identified as a strategic resource to enhance cities' attractiveness, competitiveness, and economic growth (Bianchini & Parkinson, 1993; Lysgård, 2012).

The policy priorities of that time emphasized the importance of culture as both a marketing and economic tool. In the former, high-profile buildings or events were employed to cultivate a positive image, promote civic identity, and attract investments and property developers. In the latter, governments bet on creative industries, tourism, sports, and leisure as means to contribute directly to the economic sector. However, the direct impact of cultural industries on economic growth remains uncertain. For instance, Bianchini and Parkinson's (1993) analysis of such policies indicates that the effect of culture-led strategies on generating direct financial gains and employment is insignificant. Nevertheless, they are effective in "attracting tourists, skilled labor, and investors and diversifying [the] local economic base" (Bianchini & Parkinson, 1993, p. 15).

Most research on culture-led regeneration strategies and the actual contribution of culture to the economic, social, and spatial regeneration of cities has focused on larger, prosperous cities. Traditional theories on the role of culture and creativity in urban development (e.g., Scott's theory on cultural economy, Florida's theory on the creative class) stem from empirical research on growing cities and large metropolitan areas. However, these theories do not provide evidence of their effectiveness in the context of shrinking cities (Lorentzen & Heur, 2013). Despite this, following a few well-known examples of culture-led regeneration in post-industrial cities like Bilbao, Glasgow, and Manchester, the municipalities of shrinking cities often attempt to apply the same models in hopes of

replicating their success. For example, the Latvian city of Liepāja, with a population of 68,945, which has lost 30% of its residents in the last thirty years, constructed the Great Amber Concert Hall with a budget of EUR 31,202,112 (Figure 1). The investments came from European, national, and municipal funds (European Commission, 2017). In their attempts to strengthen their position and attract external residents, shrinking cities "often compete for external resources (public investments from regional, national or European funds) and do not consider the demographically obvious shrinkage processes that may make some of the investments unnecessary in the longer perspective" (Leetmaa et al., 2015, p. 163).

Figure 1. Great Amber Concert Hall in Liepāja, Latvia, May 2019 by MichalPL under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

Research specifically devoted to understanding how culture-led regeneration strategies hinder or contribute to the processes of urban shrinkage is scarce. Rousseau (2009), and Liebmann & Fröhlich (2012), Aber & Yahagi (2014), and Leetmaa et al. (2015) studied the role of large-scale cultural-led regeneration strategies in the economic and social development of shrinking areas. Sanchez-Moral (2017) and Bontje (2015) published on creative cities and the creative class in the context of urban shrinkage, while Fol (2012) and Sabot & Roth (2013) touched upon the socio-spatial consequences of large-scale culture-led projects. The analysis of these studies reveals that cultural flagships and 'creative city' are the most researched strategies in urban planning. These strategies aim to stimulate economic regrowth of cities to counter their shrinking trajectory. The main goals of these strategies are to attract tourism, inward and international investments, new businesses, and external residents, especially the creative class.

However, growth-oriented culture-led regeneration strategies might not be affective in the context of urban shrinkage for four main reasons. First, the new growth that these strategies aim to drive is often achieved at the expense of surrounding, less attractive cities and countryside. In the long run, it creates a zero-sum game, meaning that it costs some cities as much as it benefits others, which raises a question about the sustainability of such strategies at the regional and national levels (Bontje, 2015). Due to the current lack of national and regional support for shrinking cities, direct competition between neighboring areas and the 'survival of the fittest' race is expected to remain (Schlappa, 2017).

Second, growth-oriented culture-led regeneration strategies are costly for municipalities. To give an impression, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao project costed 166 million euro (Tribe, 2011). From a long-term perspective, flagship strategies require large amounts of public funds not only for development but also for the maintenance of the architectural object, which could be even costlier. For instance, the annual maintenance costs for the Great Amber Hall in Liepāja are estimated to be around 150,000 euros (Kirilko, 2018). In some cases, the funding for construction costs is supported by external funds: for instance, the largest share could come from European or national funds, so the shrinking municipality does not have to bear large expenses. However, maintenance costs usually come from the

municipality budget. In the long run, this can drain the already shrinking budget and leave fewer funding opportunities for other city projects and initiatives. The expense of maintaining these high-profile facilities has at times led to cuts in support for more participatory and locally owned initiatives that, at a lesser cost, could prove more sustainable in the long term (García, 2004).

Third, some scholars argue against the overly optimistic assumptions of the effectiveness of creative city and flagship culture-led strategies in attracting the creative class from other cities (Haase et al., 2012; Hospers, 2011). The main mistake shrinking cities make when applying growth-oriented culture-led strategies is that they all compete for the same groups of population: young, talented middle-class individuals. Failing to be unique and following international models, shrinking cities entre into competition with the most prosperous cities like New York or Amsterdam, and fail to win. That is why Hospers (2011) suggests that governments focus on 'warm' marketing strategies that aim to retain current residents rather than compete for extremal migrants. Additionally, research by Comunian and Mould (2014) concluded that local creative industries do not benefit from flagship cultural strategies aimed at attracting international actors. The authors called for a reconsideration of the blindly established positive link between flagship cultural strategies and the development of creative industries.

Fourth, neoliberal cultural strategies predominantly pursue economic goals and often pay little attention to socio-spatial, socio-economic, and sociocultural aspects of urban life. Growth-oriented culture-led regeneration strategies have been extensively criticized for having 'few winner and many more losers' (Bontje, 2015). First, they often appear to be a strategy of gentrification (Atkinson, 2004). To attract the creative class, cities must adapt the urban environment to the tastes of creatives. "Low income residents are never part of the desirable population that urban regeneration strategies seek to attract" (Fol, 2012, p. 268), so the history and local heritage of the working class or minorities is neglected. Additionally, profits are often concentrated in the area of development, leaving pockets of deprivation on the edges (Cunningham-Sabot & Roth, 2013; Seo, 2002). Thus, such strategies often intensify the socio-spatial segregation in shrinking cities by further excluding vulnerable groups.

Many cities with poor growth potential struggle to win the competition for external funding from national or European sources and are in danger of lagging further behind. The failure intensifies pessimism in local governments, as in the case of Asturias described by Heeringa (2020). "Without explicit policy support, many cities with poor growth potential might struggle to succeed in the competition for investments from European sources, and most likely also from national sources, thus they are in danger of falling further behind" (Schlappa, 2017, p. 163). Therefore, rather than pursuing a logic of growth, shrinking cities might need to rely more on local resources that they have control over, and on local stakeholders to tackle the consequences of decline (Schlappa, 2017).

1.4.3.2.2. Alternative culture-led regeneration strategies

Over the last decade, cases of the so-called 'alternative' culture-led regeneration strategies have emerged in academic publications (e.g., Joo & Hoon Park, 2017; Koizumi, 2015; Lazarević, Koružnjak, & Devetaković, 2016; Winkler, Oikarinen, Simpson, Michaelson, & Gonzalez, 2016). Alternative strategies to growth-oriented ones follow several common

trends. Spatially, they are developed at the neighbourhood level and are usually located in public spaces, community centres, or empty buildings. In terms of their organizational structure, they follow a participatory form of project organization and implementation. The key stakeholders generally include the municipality, residents, professional artists, and cultural NGOs. However, the municipality's role is not primary; the leading role is taken by artists, professional cultural organizations, community leaders, or residents themselves. The main aims of alternative culture-led regeneration strategies are to address social issues, enable local resources and empower local communities. That is why they do not focus primarily on the production or artistic objects and physical change but on the *process* of collective artistic creation together with residents. Lastly, such projects are low in cost, low-risk, and low-profile.

Cases of alternative culture-led regeneration strategies have been documented internationally: in America, Asia, and Europe. In the European context, two cases are worth discussing: Open Space Gallery in Halle (Salle), Germany (Gribat, 2017; Radzimski, 2018) and Heerlen Murals, the Netherlands (URBACT, 2017). In both cities, street-art strategies of urban regeneration aimed to change the image and marketability of the urban area by turning the facades of abandoned buildings into mural paintings. In both cities, the mural street art movement started as an autonomous bottom-up initiative later picked up by the city authorities and political leaders. In Heerlen, street art was developed through a process of co-creation with artists, local businesses, and residents who took co-ownership of the project (URBACT, 2017). In Halle, the bottom-up movement became institutionalized: a group of artists was invited to develop a citizen-led neighbourhood concept for the area. It was an unprecedented case of outsourcing a planning process to a neighbourhood-based group rather than a professional planning agency (Gribat, 2017). Both projects, therefore, proved to contribute to urban governance.

A similar bottom-up strategy took place in Detroit, the city often regarded as "the icon of the failure" of American industrial metropolis (Oswalt, 2006). It emerged as a number of socially engaged art projects and resulted in a comprehensive strategy of social, economic, and physical change. In the context of severe urban shrinkage and housing vacancies, the city government initiated a demolition program that tore down around 38,000 houses between 1995 and 2010 (Herscher, 2013). Parallel to that, the abandoned properties and vacant land were occupied by local artists attracted by the affordable living and working spaces, as well as the symbolic, political, and aesthetic values of empty houses (ibid.). Many art-based grassroots projects emerged: The Heidelberg Project, Object Orange, The Artists Village, or Eastern Market. One of the projects, the Power House, renovated derelict properties using recycled materials for artists' residencies. Developed as a socially interactive project, the Power House served as a platform for neighbourhood revitalization, education, and communication between community members. It resulted in fostering neighbourhood identity and social capital (Covert, 2012).

Several examples of community-based art projects have been documented in East Asia. Koizumi (2015) describes a case in the Japanese shrinking city of Niiga, which was formed out of merged municipalities due to severe demographic decline. As a result, the city's identity was lost and needed to be re-established. The local administration established Mizutsuchi festival to promote community development based on participatory art activities between artists and citizens. The activities were located in the "former fishery landing ports, closed schools, or old residences" (ibid., p. 143). Artists helped residents discover unique

local history and culture, and citizens' creativity, which gave rise to new community projects. Among the results of this strategy, the author mentions new uses for abandoned infrastructure, improved citizens' participation and cooperation, reinvented local creativity, and established local identity (ibid.).

In their paper, Joo and Hoon Park (2017) analysed another case of community-led regeneration in a declining commercial district of Busan, South Korea. Developed by the local cultural planner in collaboration with local government, the strategy aimed to develop artists' residencies in abandoned properties. The municipality covered the rents for artists' studios, and in return, the artists offered free workshops for residents. The reported results confirm the inflow of small businesses to the area, an improved neighbourhood image with increasing tourism, as well as a rise in land property values (by 3%, which does not yet indicate gentrification). Besides, the programme fostered communication between residents, artists, property owners, and the government and triggered a cultural policy change: based on the success of small-scale community art strategy, the city announced a new cultural plan that prioritized enhancing soft power and moving away from heavily infrastructure-based cultural projects (ibid.).

To conclude this section on culture's role in shrinking cities, it has become apparent that neoliberal culture-led regeneration strategies, which are based on growth coalitions, do not often provide ideal solutions for shrinking municipalities. Instead, small-scale cultural projects, which are often developed and implemented by grassroots actors, might stimulate structural changes in governance structures and relationships between actors in governance networks. In this thesis, I focus on exploring these community-focused cultural strategies in shrinking cities. Through my empirical data from two shrinking cities—Riga and Oberhausen—I explore what opportunities these alternative strategies offer for local governments.

CHAPTER 2

“Force majeure”: The transformation of cultural strategy as a result of urban shrinkage and economic crisis

Abstract

Cultural strategies have been commonly used to address the consequences of urban shrinkage, particularly in a post-industrial context. Proliferated growth-oriented models, such as "creative city," have threatened the sustainable development of shrinking cities. Alternative cultural models that prioritize social inclusion, local sensitivity, and affordability are thus urgently needed. Using Riga as a case study, this paper explores the process of transformation to an alternative cultural strategy in a post-socialist shrinking city and identifies planning and governance tools that stimulate its development. Employing qualitative interviews and document analysis, the relations between emergent and deliberate cultural strategies are investigated. The results show how the organization of the European Capital of Culture 2014 during the severe shrinkage and economic crisis led to five elements of an alternative cultural strategy: (1) a shift from investing in cultural "hardware" to "software," (2) a locally sensitive approach, (3) cultural decentralization, (4) strengthened civic engagement, and (5) inclusiveness. These elements of an emergent strategy were recognized by local authorities and stimulated changes in the deliberate cultural strategy. This study supports the idea that urban shrinkage offers municipalities an opportunity to reimagine traditional planning practices and emphasizes the important role of civic actors' participation in coproducing public services and governance strategies.

2.1. Introduction

Although urban shrinkage is not a new urban phenomenon, it occurred with renewed vigor at the end of the 20th century. After the industrial crisis, cities all over the world experienced economic recession, followed by unemployment and residential outmigration. In Europe, the industrial recession was accompanied by natural demographic decline, political restructuring, suburbanization, and environmental pollution (Wiechmann & Bontje, 2015). As a result of the urban shrinkage, cities faced significant financial, environmental, social, and infrastructural challenges. Research on the population trajectories of European municipalities suggests that one in five has faced significant population decline between 1990 and 2010 (Wiechmann & Wolff, 2013). Post-socialist European countries are particularly affected by urban shrinkage. For example, in Latvia and Lithuania, more than 90% of municipalities experienced population decline between 1990 and 2010 (ibid). This trend is not expected to cease in the near future. According to the European Commission (2020), its member states will face progressive demographic decline after 2030, further threatening post-socialist states.

In the past few decades, research on shrinking cities has strongly developed. Elaborate studies exist on the effect of population decline on the economic sector (Hartt & Warkentin, 2017; Rumpel et al., 2013), social structures (Fol, 2012b; Ročak et al., 2016a, 2016b), the environment (Schetke & Haase, 2008; Schilling & Logan, 2008), land use, and infrastructure (Hollander & Németh, 2011; Schenkel, 2015). However, little is written about the effect of population decline on the arts and the cultural field. This topic deserves careful exploration because traditional pro-growth models, such as "creative city" and "flagship development," have evoked heated debates regarding both their efficiency and their economic and social sustainability, particularly in shrinking cities. Critical studies indicate that such strategies often result in sociospatial segregation, gentrification, and cultural homogenization, as well as reinforcing the "vicious circle" of urban decline (De Franz, 2013; Grodach, 2010a; Lin & Hsing, 2009; Pastak & Kährik, 2017; Rousseau, 2009b; Seo, 2002; Zukin, 1995). It has become clear that an innovative approach to cultural strategy is needed.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to investigate an alternative approach to cultural strategy in shrinking cities. To this end, it is helpful to understand whether there is a real need for an alternative cultural strategy in the context of shrinking cities and, if there is, how the transformation towards an alternative approach occurs. We hence address the following research questions: (1) How does urban shrinkage affect the cultural field, and why is an alternative approach needed? (2) What are the alternative elements in a cultural strategy? (3) How is the alternative cultural strategy developed, and which planning and governance tools stimulate its implementation?

The analysis of a novel approach to cultural strategy necessitates a critical exploration of cultural governance and the role of culture in urban development, expanding its role from an economic and marketing tool into a tool for social cohesion and civic empowerment. In this paper, the term culture is understood as a process of human intellectual and aesthetic development, which is manifested in cultural products such as architecture, traditions, or the arts (Lyman, 2007; Williams, 1985). Moreover, cultural strategy is defined as a course of action, where cultural process and products are utilized to achieve an intended set of goals ((author's definition based on Mintzberg et al., 1998).

On the empirical level, this paper presents the case of Riga – one of the most rapidly shrinking capitals in Europe. The analysis follows Riga's process for developing an innovative cultural strategy to win the title of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) under the rigid conditions of a world economic crisis and severe urban shrinkage. According to Beauregard (2009), severity measures the scale of population decline. Since Riga lost over a third of its population between 1989 and 2021, we adopt the term "severe urban shrinkage" to highlight this large scale.

Our paper is structured as follows: First, we discuss the specifics of shrinking cities and propose theory-driven assumptions about how they affect the arts and cultural field. This analysis is followed by several suggestions on how cultural strategies in shrinking cities should be adopted. Thereafter, we describe the methodology and present the context of Riga. In the results, we investigate how the transformation toward an alternative cultural strategy occurred in Riga and what planning and governance instruments facilitated it. Finally, in the conclusion and discussion, we summarize the key findings and link them to the broader debate on urban development in shrinking cities.

2.2. How urban shrinkage affects the cultural field

To investigate the directions for the sustainable transformation of a cultural strategy in shrinking cities, it is essential to understand how urban shrinkage affects the cultural field and why an alternative to a pro-growth strategy is needed. There is currently a lack of studies offering empirical evidence on the effect of urban shrinkage on the cultural sector. This is often associated with a lack of sufficient statistical data on the number, quality, and accessibility of cultural services and the level of cultural consumption. In Latvia, for example, the Central Statistical Bureau provides longitudinal data on the number of cultural institutions at the national level, for museums, theaters, cinemas, libraries, and cultural centers. However, this information is not available at the Riga city level. Despite the lack of data and empirical evidence, we consider it valuable to launch a discussion about the possible implications of urban shrinkage on the cultural field. Therefore, the first research question is explored through a literature review: we discuss the specific characteristics of shrinking cities and propose four theory-driven heuristic assumptions about how the arts and cultural field is affected.

First, studies show that outmigration in shrinking cities is a selective process (Fol, 2012b; Hospers, 2013b; Miot, 2015; Slach et al., 2019). Young, qualified, and educated people usually tend to move out first. In contrast, the elderly and socially underprivileged groups find it challenging to change their place of residency; thus, they become dominant groups in the social structure (Hospers, 2013b). In post-industrial contexts, some studies report high unemployment and impoverishment of their residents (Blanco et al., 2009; Rink et al., 2010). In places where most cultural services require a fee, impoverished and unemployed residents do not have many opportunities to access cultural services.

Culture is one of the social markers of a certain lifestyle, identity, and status. In one of Bourdieu's influential works (1984), he suggests that "people internalize their class position and express it in cultural choices" that reproduce the class structure (Katz-Gerro, 2002, p. 208). Another classic theory on cultural consumption proposed by Peterson (1992) states that higher and lower social classes differ not in terms of their cultural tastes but in terms of the intensity and variety of their cultural consumption. Therefore, the division is not between

highbrow and lowbrow cultural consumers but between cultural omnivores and cultural univores. The mentioned theories of cultural consumption suggest that there is a difference in demand for cultural services within different groups of residents. There is thus evidence that the social structure in shrinking cities leads to a decline in the variety of cultural consumption. Instead, an increase in demand for univore and lowbrow cultural services can be present (for example, for hobby art activities or pop culture events).

Second, several studies confirm that shrinking municipalities struggle with declining tax revenue, which leads to fiscal cutbacks and a rollout of services (Audirac, 2018; Berglund, 2020; Bierbaum, 2020; Hackworth, 2015). Under conditions of tight financial resources, municipalities are forced to make efficient investments in the most essential services and amenities. In this context, cultural policies are often considered as "nice to have" and do not receive the same political priority as, for instance, education or healthcare. This is why during times of financial austerity, cultural budgets are often cut first (Henley, 2016). Therefore, as a second assumption, we conclude that cultural budget cuts in shrinking cities lead to a declining number and quality of cultural services.

Third, several studies suggest that infrastructure services are unequally distributed in shrinking cities (Audirac, 2018; Bierbaum, 2020; Slach et al., 2019). From an economic perspective, it is rational for shrinking municipalities to develop and invest in areas with higher density (Slach et al., 2019). They consequently often follow a centralized approach to infrastructure planning. Many studies confirm that culture-led regeneration projects are often located in areas with the highest return on investments, such as in city centers or waterfronts (Boland, 2007; Darchen & Tremblay, 2013; Pastak & Kährik, 2017; Sobala-Gwosdz & Gwosdz, 2018). Therefore, our third assumption is that cultural infrastructure and services in shrinking cities are unevenly distributed when following a centralized approach. However, some studies argue that decentralized and small-scale cultural infrastructure, such as community halls and art centers, not only have an important function in encouraging local vitality and creativity but also might provide an efficient strategy for cultural development (Gibson et al., 2012, p. 299).

The fourth commonality of planning practices in shrinking cities concerns their overemphasis on quantitative and physical improvements and a lack of attention to qualitative and social aspects. Analyzing the European shrinking cities, Cortese at al. (2014) point out that social cohesion policies remain in the shadow of physical and economic policies to address urban shrinkage. Audirac (2018) confirms these findings in the North American context, pointing to the overfocus of urban strategies and academic research on "hardware" planning, with little attention to social equity and justice. Both authors conclude that more attention should be paid to the social dimensions of declining cities.

Audirac also states that social inequality may result in the spatial stigmatization of shrinking areas. The stigma – defined as "symbolic degradation" – negatively affects residents' sense of self and their capacity for collective action (in line with Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2016, p. 5). As a response, culture can play a central role in addressing the problems of negative urban image and stigmatization (Ročak et al., 2016b, p. 11). However, with the neoliberal turn, cultural values and artistic practices have been increasingly instrumentalized for economic and property-led goals (Binns, 2005; Lysgård, 2012; Sayer, 2001), especially in post-socialist cities that are characterized by weak state intervention and an extensive involvement of the private sector in urban development (Galuszka, 2017; Nedučin et al., 2019). The economized approach to culture significantly limits its broader sociocultural

functions. Moulaert et al. (2004) discuss the expanded role of culture in urban development as (1) a mode of communication, (2) an enabler of social identity and shared collective vision, (3) a tool for raising awareness and expressing public dissatisfaction, and (4) a medium for civic participation. These functions of culture contribute to developing the "social software" of cultural initiatives (Sacco & Blessi, 2009).

Breaking with the materialistic view on culture and acknowledging the importance of sociocultural functions for improving people's quality of life has become one of the approaches with which shrinking cities experiment. Such cases have been successfully implemented in East Asia, Europe, and North America (see Gribat, 2017; Joo & Hoon Park, 2017; Koizumi, 2015; Winkler et al., 2016). (2017) documented one such model of culture-led regeneration in Busan, Korea. The project – the redevelopment of the old industrial downtown – focused on promoting the intangible cultural values of the district and reviving the community spirit. The non-state project leaders aimed to minimize physical change and preserve the urban history shared by local residents, with the idea that urban regeneration would follow. The authors report that the project improved residents' quality of life, developed social capital, and even triggered a socially driven transition in the municipal cultural policy. This project illustrates how urban regeneration can be achieved through the development of substantive software "without big investments and physical renovation, toward enhancing intangible values of locality" (Joo & Hoon Park, 2017, p. 859).

Sacco and Blessi (2009) also argue that investments in "software" is crucial: "without proper, supporting 'social software', massive investment in new cultural facilities may assume a dysfunctional 'cosmetic' character that is likely to exacerbate the critical aspects of urban transformation rather than tempering them" (p. 1115). This leads to the final assumption that cultural strategies in shrinking cities follow a physical and economic "hardware" approach. However, due to the increasing social and mental problems in shrinking areas and the ability of culture to address them, cultural strategies in shrinking cities should prioritize "social software" to tackle the consequences of urban shrinkage.

In summary, the state-of-the-art research on culture and shrinking cities reveals several points about how urban shrinkage affects the cultural field, which allows us to derive why an alternative to a pro-growth approach is needed:

(1) The changes in demographic structure might lead to a decline in cultural consumption, particularly in the highbrow and professional arts. Therefore, changes in cultural offers are required, for instance an increase in popular and amateur cultural activities and improvements in physical and financial accessibility of cultural services to elderly and socially underprivileged groups.

(2) The financial austerity of shrinking municipalities might lead to cultural budget cuts, declining availability and quality of cultural services, and a decline in support for cultural amenities and employment. Cultural strategies might include flexible financial schemes to ensure sufficient support for cultural institutions, as well as to innovate with affordable strategies for cultural development.

(3) Shrinking cities might experience an unequal (often centralized) distribution of cultural infrastructure services, which reinforces sociospatial segregation. Therefore, improving accessibility to and the spatial decentralization of cultural services should be prioritized.

(4) Shrinking cities are characterized by an overemphasis on hardware planning and a lack of attention to social problems. Culture as a planning tool can be efficient in tackling social problems; thus, cultural strategies should prioritize investments in "social software."

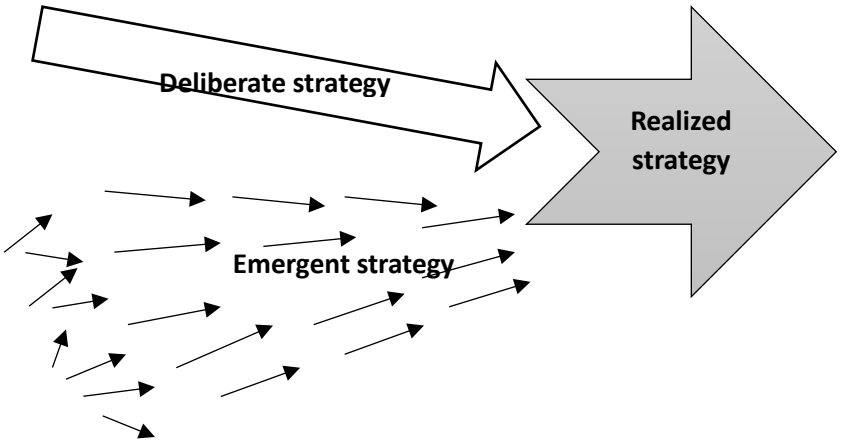
In the next sections, we describe the research design and methods for the empirical part of this study to answer the two remaining research questions: (2) What does an alternative cultural strategy imply? (3) How is the alternative cultural strategy developed in Riga, and which planning and governance tools stimulate its implementation?

2.3. Research design and methods

The empirical part of this research is based on a single-case-study methodology. Gerring (2007) defines a case as a "spatially and temporally delimited phenomenon of theoretical significance" (p. 27). The advantage of single-case studies is that they allow researchers to explore one complex social phenomenon in depth, account many details, and find explanations that standardized quantitative methods are not able to find. Moreover, a single-case study allows one to gain a more precise understanding of the circumstances in which the social phenomenon develops; in that sense, it can be even more reliable and insightful than multiple-case studies (Stake, 2000). This study does not claim to produce generalizable empirical evidence about the development of one-size-fits-all sustainable cultural strategy for shrinking cities. Instead, the goal of using a single-case-study methodology is to conduct a longitudinal in-depth analysis of cultural strategy development in a context of a post-socialist shrinking city, as well as identifying the strategy elements and planning tools occurred in that particular context. Among the population of post-socialist shrinking cities, we selected Riga in Latvia. The case was analyzed within the temporal boundaries of 2004–2021 – the period of severe shrinkage and global financial crisis until the time of writing. The choice of a longitudinal case aims to track how the trajectory of urban shrinkage developed and affected the transformation of a cultural strategy.

The object of analysis in this study is the cultural strategy in Riga. In strategic planning, two forms of strategy are distinguished: deliberate and emergent (Mintzberg et al., 1998). A deliberate strategy entails an intended, explicitly formulated (in official documents) course of action that is implemented by engaged stakeholders. However, an efficient strategy often cannot result from a predetermined top-down plan. Therefore, another type of strategy is crucial: an emergent strategy, which comprises a course of action that was not initially expressly intended but, after its incremental realization, "converged to some sort of consistency or pattern" (Mintzberg et al., 1998, p. 11). A real-world strategy can rarely be purely deliberate or emergent; it is usually a mix of both predictive top-down planning and reactive bottom-up actions (see Figure 1). Such a combination contributes to effective management because the deliberate strategy "enriches an organization with a sense of purposeful direction," whereas an emergent strategy "implies that the organization is learning incrementally" (Wiechmann, 2007, p. 5). According to Mintzberg (1998), effective strategies should contain emergent qualities because these qualities drive strategic learning, novelty, and organizational capacity to experiment.

Figure 1. *Forms of strategy*



Source. Mintzberg et al., 1998, p. 12.

In shrinking cities, the demand for experimentation with alternative solutions is high, but public authorities generally struggle to innovate them on their own. Budget deficits, a rising number of infrastructural and social problems, and the lack of institutional capacity often prevent public authorities from taking risks, experimenting, and innovating (Hospers, 2014; Schlappa, 2017). Many authors thus emphasize that in shrinking cities, "local authorities will not be able to cope with the effects of shrinkage of their city on their own" (Stryjakiewicz & Jaroszewska, 2016, p. 34) and must stimulate bottom-up solutions that engage civic actors (Haase et al., 2012; Hospers, 2013; Ročak et al., 2016a; Schlappa, 2017).

In our strategy analysis, we distinguished between emergent and deliberate strategies in order to see how each type transforms under the conditions of economic crisis and severe urban shrinkage, how they affect each other, and whether both of them can provide an efficient alternative approach to cultural strategy. Therefore, our analysis of strategy transformation consisted of two phases. In the first phase, the emergent or the "actually existing" cultural strategy in Riga was investigated. For this, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary source of data. We conducted 21 semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders involved in urban and cultural planning and bottom-up cultural activities in Riga (see Appendix). The majority of the interviews were conducted in person in October 2019 and September 2020. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a few interviews took place online via video calls. All interviews were held in English or Russian and transcribed by the author. The research participants were identified via snowball sampling and represent different types of professions: civil servants, cultural NGO professionals, activists, artists, and residents, as well as a landscape designer and a private property owner. The variety of stakeholders ensured the reliability of data and allowed for all-encompassing insights about the incremental actions that have become part of the emergent strategy during the selected timeframe.

In the second phase, the deliberate cultural strategy was analyzed based on three types of official strategic documents: a long-term municipal development strategy, a short-term municipal development strategy, and a municipal cultural strategy. The long-term development strategy of Riga established the vision for city development, strategic objectives, spatial development perspective, and priorities. The mid-term development strategy established the action plan and the division of tasks to be implemented. Finally,

Riga's cultural strategy established a long-term development vision, strategic goals, and development priorities in the cultural field, considering the national and regional cultural policy directions. Overall, seven strategic documents were analyzed (see Table 1). These texts were in Latvian and translated via Google Translate. Where available, an English version was examined to ensure the accuracy of translation and the coherence of the used terms and definitions. The primary and secondary data were analyzed in MAXQDA using content analysis – a method associated with the study of inscription contained in documents, texts, or speeches (Prior, 2014).

Table 1. *Strategic documents included in the analysis.*

№	Document title	№ of pages
Long-term strategic documents		
1	Riga long-term development strategy until 2025	63
2	Sustainable Development Strategy of Riga until 2030	83
Mid-term strategic documents		
3	Riga Development Program 2006–2012	197
4	Riga Development Program 2010–2013	86
5	Riga Development Program 2014–2020	116
Cultural strategic documents		
6	Riga City Cultural Strategy for 2008–2025	26
7	Riga City Municipal Cultural Strategy for 2017–2030	25
	Total:	596

2.4. Context of the case study – Riga, Latvia

2.4.1. Urban shrinkage

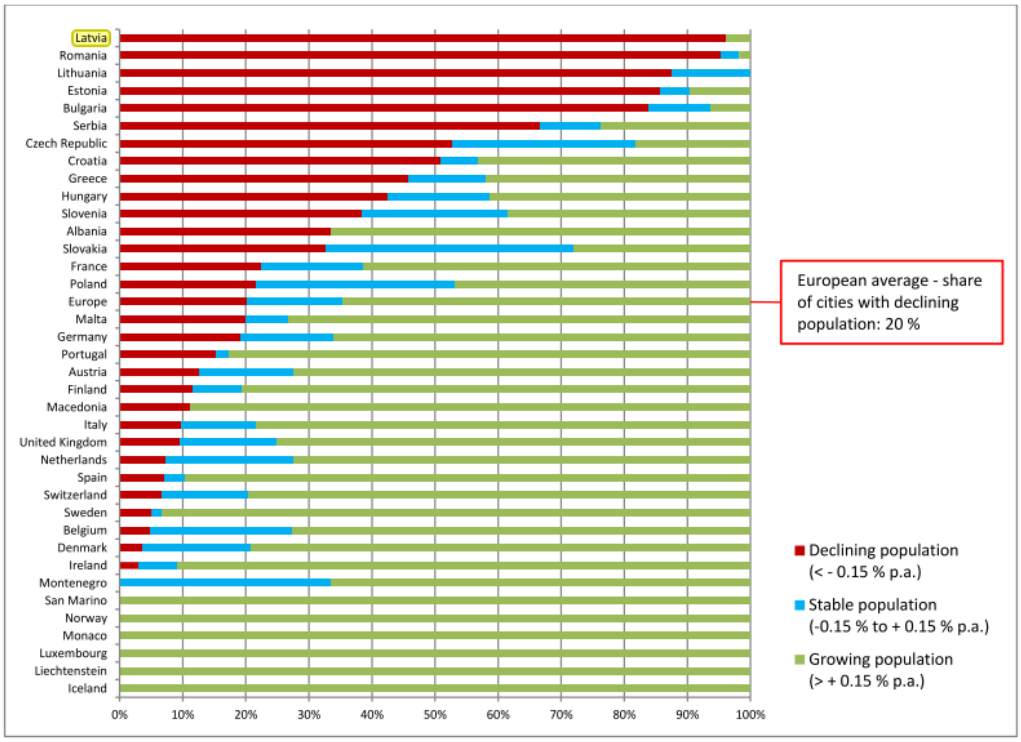
According to Wiechmann and Wolff's (2013) typology of European shrinking cities, Latvia tops the list of countries with the largest share of continuously shrinking cities between 1990 and 2010 (See Figure 2).

Riga is the capital of Latvia. More than 30% of the Latvian population resides in Riga. Even with a population decline of over 30% in the last 30 years, Riga remains the largest city in the Baltics. The process of urban shrinkage in the city resulted from negative natural population change, outmigration, and suburbanization. The outmigration process in Riga occurred over four waves (see Figure 3), triggered by political and economic factors: (1) the fall of the Soviet Union, (2) high unemployment before Latvia's EU accession; (3) Latvia's accession into the EU, and (4) the world economic crisis of 2008–2009. The processes that occurred during each of the outmigration waves are summarized below.

(1) During the Soviet occupation of Latvia from 1944 to 1989, Riga underwent rapid industrialization and collectivization processes. The city grew substantially – the population almost doubled, and infrastructure increased rapidly. The population growth was largely driven by the influx of the Russian-speaking population who entered the city either forcefully (to join the industrial and military sector) or voluntarily, as the Baltic States had the highest wages and living standards in the Soviet Union (Hazans, 2013). Demographic growth was the main result of the rapid development of industries and the military sector. Fast urbanization processes led to overstretched urban infrastructure: mass housing estates, transportation, and gray and social infrastructure. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the armed forces

withdrew, and the industrial sector declined. Outmigration mostly occurred within the Russian-speaking population – those employed by the Soviet administration and the industrial sector, and army members.

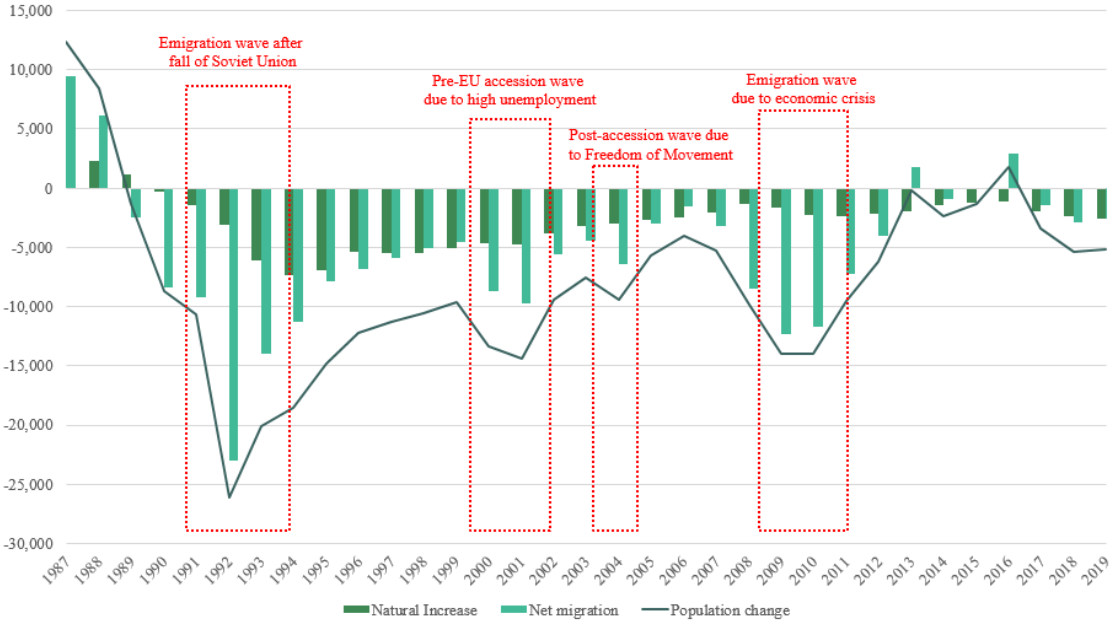
Figure 2. *European cities with population loss, stability, and growth from 1990–2010 per country.*



Source. Wiechmann & Wolff (2013, p.11).

Figure 3. *Population decline and the four stages of outmigration in Riga, Latvia, 1987–2019.*

Note. Author's compilation based on data from the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.



(2) The second wave is associated with the pre-EU accession of Latvia to the European Union. Just before the accession, the country faced high levels of unemployment and low salaries. Many highly educated residents of working age migrated to improve their material wellbeing. It is important to note, however, that several independent studies contradict the data provided by the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, claiming that the pre-accession wave was considerably smaller than the post-accession wave (Hazans, 2019; Krasnopjorovs, 2011).
(3) The third large wave occurred after the EU accession of Latvia in 2004. The freedom of labor movement significantly reduced costs and mental barriers of migration. After Latvia became an EU member state, its economy and labor market began to grow, retaining some of the residents inside the country and attracting a return of immigrants (Hazans, 2019).
(4) The fourth large wave of outmigration occurred during the world economic crisis of 2007–2008. Compared to the majority of European countries, Latvia was severely affected by the crisis, with full-time employment dropping by over 30% by 2010 (Hazans, 2013, p. 66). Working-age residents migrated to E.U. countries with low unemployment such as Norway, the Netherlands, and the UK. The emigration during 2009–2011 reached unprecedented speed to the extent that it "pose[d] a threat to the reproduction of the Latvian population, the country's economic development and the sustainability of its social security system" (Hazans, 2019, p. 67).

The research by Hazans (2019) also indicates that 57% of emigrants from Latvia in the 21st century were female, which aggravated the declining birth rates in the country. Moreover, the country lost a large number of younger (under 35) and educated people. This fact further intensified an aging population, as well as an economic and labor decline. Despite the steady population decline, the gross domestic product of Latvia and Riga steadily grew, and the unemployment rate declined. However, a large proportion of the employees in Riga were residents of other municipalities, so-called work commuters (people who work in Riga but live outside its territory). The process of suburbanization resulted in the city losing a large part of the total amount of potentially obtainable personal income tax (Riga City Council [Rīgas dome], 2005, p. 6).

2.4.2. Cultural landscape

Being the capital city of Latvia and one of the largest cities in the Baltic Sea Region, Riga has a rich cultural landscape that is recognized internationally. The city center is one of the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage sites. Riga is known for having the world's highest quantity and quality of Art Nouveau architecture and unique wooden architecture. As the capital city, Riga is home to important state, municipal, and private cultural institutions (Riga City Council [Rīgas dome], 2014a).

However, despite the sufficient number of cultural institutions and historical buildings, many of them are concentrated in the city center and are unequally distributed across residential neighborhoods. The limited number of cultural institutions in the periphery creates unequal access of residents to cultural participation, which threatens social justice and raises further questions about the equitable access to public resources in shrinking cities (in line with Bierbaum, 2020). In addition, many cultural and historical buildings are in poor or emergency conditions, which might lead to further closures of cultural institutions. The municipality lacks effective measures for cultural preservation and restoration (Riga City

Council [Rīgas dome], 2014a, p. 87). Moreover, the city still lacks some crucial cultural infrastructure, such as a contemporary art museum and large exhibition spaces.

2.5. Results

In this section, the deliberate and emergent cultural strategies in Riga are analyzed: we track the transformation of cultural strategy in the official strategic documents of Riga city and explore cultural actions taking place on the ground. The data revealed that the 2014 ECoC has been the central event that unveiled the innovative emergent strategy and triggered changes in the strategic approach toward culture in policy and planning. Therefore, the ECoC 2014 is the central theme in the analysis. We approach this section in chronological order. First, we analyze the approach to culture in the deliberate strategy before the ECoC 2014 event. Then, we analyze the process of the ECoC organization and implementation as the emergent strategy, and we describe its consequences for the deliberate strategy. We identity five main elements that indicate Riga's cultural strategy transformation toward being more efficient and sustainable: (1) the shift from investing in cultural "hardware" to "software," (2) a locally sensitive approach, (3) cultural decentralization, (4) strengthened civic engagement, and (5) inclusiveness. We also investigate the tools and instruments that encouraged these strategy transformations.

2.5.1. The transformation of the deliberate cultural strategy

Riga was selected to be the ECoC 2014. The European Union awards this title to one or several cities for one year, during which they organize cultural events. Every year, many cities compete for this opportunity because the title not only allows them to generate positive outcomes for their city and region but also raises their visibility and international profile. Winning this title is a long process that takes several years of developing the application, developing the event program, and then implementing it.

Having a long-term strategy for cultural development is one of the crucial eligibility conditions for ECoC candidacy. Therefore, in 2008, alongside the development of the application, Riga approved its first municipal cultural strategy for 2008–2025 (INT_09). To a large extent, the strategy considered culture to be the engine for economic and employment growth. It emphasized the role of creative economy and cultural industries, as well as international tourism. Prioritizing these growth-oriented industries aimed to strengthen the city's competitiveness and promote an internationally oriented image of Riga. The restoration of cultural heritage was prioritized both for its ability to increase property values and as an added value for tourism and other economic sectors (Riga City Council [Rīgas dome], 2008, p. 5). Overall, the document presented a cultural strategy typical for a post-industrial city trying to reverse the demographic and economic decline back to growth (Bianchini & Parkinson, 1993). On the one hand, it treated culture as an economic and marketing tool and catered largely to the interests of investors and tourists. On the other hand, the strategy already recognized the problem of uneven distribution of cultural services in the city and the lack of their accessibility for diverse groups of the population, especially children, youth, socially excluded groups, and residents with special needs. Furthermore, the strategy mentioned public participation as one of the principles of cultural strategy, although it offered little elaboration on how this participation could be elicited (Riga City Council [Rīgas dome], 2008).

After the ECoC, the second municipal cultural strategy for 2017–2030 was approved. The innovations and lessons learned during the realization of the emergent cultural strategy were applied in the new deliberate strategy. There, culture was no longer seen as a tool for economic gains but was interlinked with social integration, civic participation, and neighborhood development. Instead of promoting the international image of Riga, the new deliberate strategy built on the concept of a neighborhood and prioritized the development of cultural services in residential areas (Riga City Council [Rīgas dome], 2017). Instead of creative and cultural industries, it emphasized the amateur arts and popular cultural offers intended to increase cultural inclusiveness for diverse population groups. Section 5.2 elaborates on how these strategy transformations occurred.

2.5.2. The transformation of the emergent cultural strategy

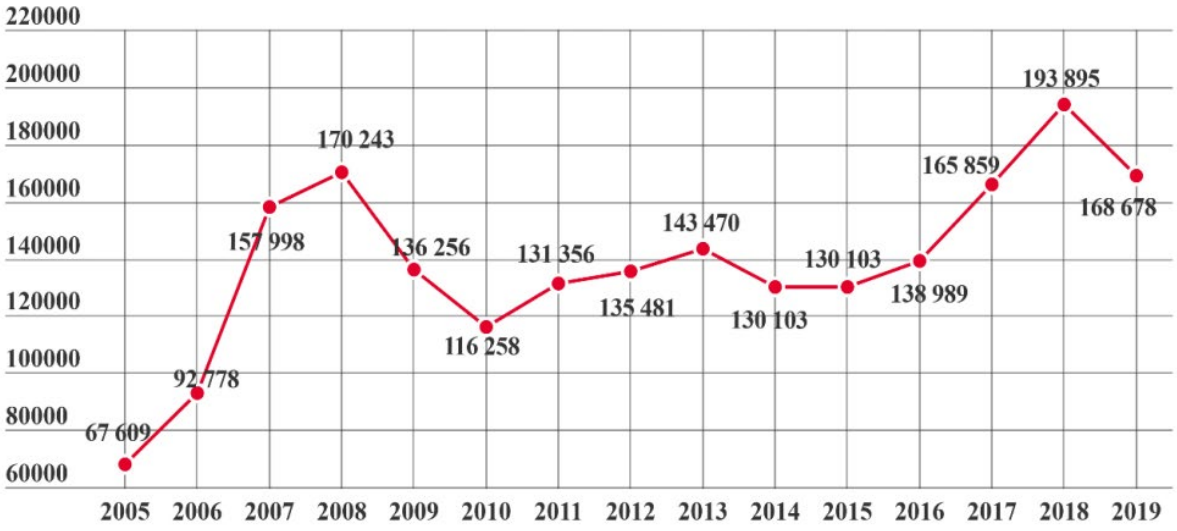
2.5.2.1. From cultural "hardware" to cultural "software"

In Riga, the concept and program for the ECoC was developed by an independent foundation formed specifically for the event and headed by the director of the Cultural Department of the Riga City Council. Preparations for the ECoC began in 2008, the year in which the world economic crisis hit. One of the representatives of the ECoC Foundation explained, "We had the program titled Force Majeure, because we started this project when it was an absolute crisis all over the world." The economic situation in Riga was difficult, especially in preparation for an iconic event. Cities that become cultural capitals tend to invest in constructing cultural infrastructure and running urban regeneration projects. The Latvian national and Riga city governments also planned several ambitious infrastructure projects for the year of the ECoC, including "the new building for the Latvian National Library, a new Riga Concert Hall, an improvement programme for the National Museum of Art and a new Contemporary Art Museum in a former thermal power plant" (European Commission, 2015, p. 46). Of these, only the first two projects were completed as part of the ECoC program; the rest did not succeed due to the bankruptcy of their investors (ibid.).

Latvia was one of the European countries most severely affected by the economic crisis. According to the official information in the Municipal Public Reports, during 2009–2010, the budget of the Ministry of Culture was cut by 42% (see Figure 4), and the municipal cultural budget in Riga by almost half (49%). The lack of private investments and significant public cuts negatively affected a large number of actors in the arts and cultural sector and limited the scope of cultural offers in the city (INT_4). When it became clear that the infrastructure projects could not be realized, the ECoC Foundation decided to invest in cultural software – in support of cultural institutions and civic initiatives to help them service and sustain cultural services: "we did not invest in buildings; we invested in communities" (INT_14).

The strategy to focus on cultural software is in line with Oswalt's (2005a, 2005b) idea of "weak planning" or Elzerman and Bontje's (2015) notion of "alternative planning." The authors argue that "soft" planning tools, such as cultural development or the empowerment of social networks, present a prime opportunity to move from the traditional "hard" physical types of planning and trigger an attitude change regarding urban shrinkage as an opportunity rather than a threat. In Riga, the development of cultural software was realized through the geographical division of the city into smaller spatial areas: neighborhoods. Next, we describe how these processes go hand in hand.

Figure 4. *Budget expenditure of the Ministry of Culture (in Euro).*



Source. Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2020, p. 13.

2.5.2.2. Toward a locally sensitive approach

In 2007, the City Development Department of the Riga City Council started working on a new spatial concept that divided Riga into 58 neighborhoods. The initial idea was for the neighborhoods to serve as statistical borders for analytical purposes to monitor urban processes such as the medium temperature in hospitals (INT_08). However, after the consultation phases in 2011, the idea took on a different meaning: "underscoring the integration of local society – the communities – in the city" (Gugane, 2020). Now, the urban development strategy defines a neighborhood as a suitably sized population with its own identity and character, which stems from the type of building, physical boundaries, landscape, and a sense of community (Riga City Council [Rīgas dome], 2014b). Interestingly, in many cases, the neighborhoods were not artificially created, but reproduced the historical boundaries of manors, hamlets, or villages, which merged into the modern city of Riga (INT_08). Thus, for some areas, the historical identity of place existed, yet it needed to be rediscovered.

Culture served as the main driver to rediscover the identity of the new geographical territories, around which people could gather, connect to their part of the city, and form a community. The ECoC Foundation picked up the neighborhood division concept and decided to use it as a map to one of the six events of the cultural program (INT_14). This event – titled the Road Map – invited residents to think about city development issues in their neighborhoods and offered small funds to implement their ideas. In addition, several experts were invited to help residents develop their ideas into feasible projects (INT_02). As a result, 117 projects took place in Riga neighborhoods: guided tours, bicycle routes, open house days, theater and circus performances, and social gatherings in unusual places (European Commission, 2015).

The Road Map relied on residents' knowledge of local resources such as public spaces or local history, and it allowed people to find solutions to acute problems in their neighborhoods. This gave rise to the locally sensitive approach to planning, where culture appeared as a local resource and a tool for civic participation. The project also relied on

local human resources – residents who volunteered to design and implement their own projects. Given the limited financial resources, volunteering enabled successful event realization and strengthened the capacities of neighborhood-based actors. According to the ECoC ex post evaluation, 87% of civic organizations felt that their capacity in the longer term had "strengthened" or "significantly strengthened" (European Commission, 2015, p. 66). These actions affected the deliberate strategy: the municipal cultural strategy for 2017–2030 recognized the coordinated involvement of volunteers in organization of ECoC 2014 as one the most successful forms of participation (Riga City Council [Rīgas dome], 2017, p. 14).

2.5.2.3. Cultural decentralization

The distribution of cultural infrastructure in Riga follows a centralized approach: the majority of such infrastructure is located in the city center, while 65% of residential neighborhoods have no cultural amenities and services in their vicinity (Riga City Council, 2021). Within the Road Map project, the communities organized a wide range of cultural events in their neighborhoods, which ensured wider participation of diverse social groups, including the marginalized and socially underprivileged (INT_14). One of the neighborhood activists shared:

> *Something was happening in the neighborhood, finally. Because a lot of things always happen only in the center, for tourists. And you need to come to downtown to experience some things like contemporary arts or any other genres, so we try to bring something in a neighborhood (INT_02).*

According to the European Commission's ex post evaluation of the ECoC, "this ensured that culture was found next door and in the faces of marginalised communities in a way that had not occurred before" (European Commission, 2015, p. 52).

These emergent actions affected the deliberate strategy. The municipal cultural strategy for 2017–2030 states that communities are more active in neighborhoods with a sufficient number of cultural amenities. For example, it was found that neighborhoods of the Soviet epoch lack community meeting spaces, and their residents are less active in cultural participation, while old historical neighborhoods of Riga that have community spaces and cultural centers have higher levels of civic participation. The most efficient type of cultural infrastructure for residential neighborhoods is a multifunctional neighborhood cultural center. The renovation and construction of multifunctional cultural centers outside of the center hence became a strategy objective for 2017–2030 (Riga City Council [Rīgas dome], 2017, p. 14).

2.5.2.4. Strengthening civic engagement

The neighborhood division concept and the engagement of neighborhood communities in the ECoC program served as fertile ground not only for cultural decentralization but also for civic engagement. The Road Map encouraged neighborhood residents to participate in the urban planning process and provided them with capacities and resources to realize their ideas. According to the report of the European Commission (2015), 47% of activities were organized by local communities.

These neighborhood initiatives around cultural events gave rise to neighborhood-based associations (NAs) – nongovernmental organizations formed by local inhabitants. One of the NA representatives shared:

> *I believe that the fact that the Riga City Council created neighborhood divisions really helped some of the neighborhoods to develop, to organize themselves, including myself. I started to found an NGO only after the neighbourhood concept presentation, for example.*

In their interview, a representative of Riga City Council noticed that before the implementation of the new spatial concept, only three NAs existed in Riga. However, after they started to promote the idea of identity, a sense of belonging, and community building, more than 20 NGOs emerged in Riga neighborhoods (INT_08). In Figure 5, neighborhoods with NAs are depicted in green, and neighborhoods with an NA that is also part of the umbrella organization – the "Riga Neighborhood Alliance" – are shaded in a striped green.

NAs play an important role in developing cultural and leisure offers in the neighborhoods. Many NAs are involved in organizing cultural activities with residents, some of which aim at improving the urban environment. In their interviews, the representatives of three NAs described culture as a positive instrument to attract attention to urban problems, mobilize people, and raise public awareness (INT_02, INT_19, & INT_21). However, one of them also said that cultural projects were only useful at the beginning of their work but are no longer efficient for their goals. Now, instead of cultural projects, they focus on larger and hazardous issues such as river pollution:

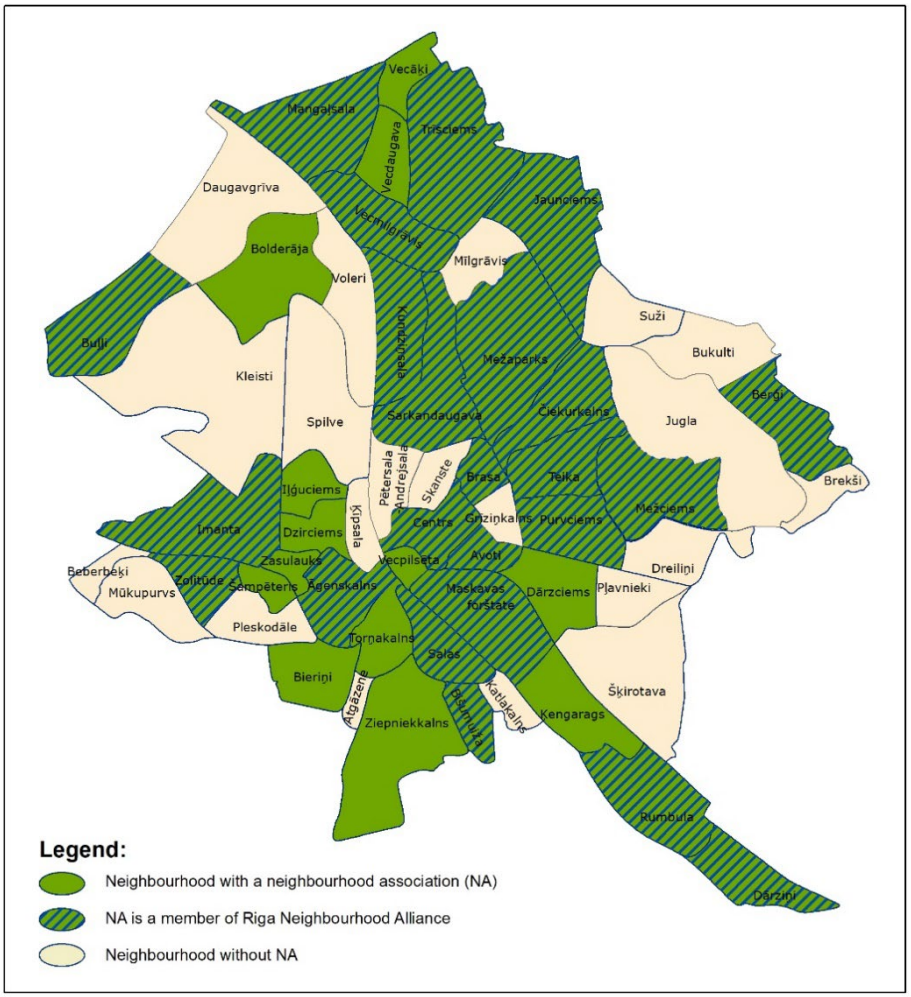
> *I stopped doing small things with culture. We did it for the first 4 years in order to raise awareness between local inhabitants. We made the neighborhood a bit more visible and more appreciated by the locals, by creating some cultural events. It was not about art per se, it was about public space. Culture is an instrument to raise awareness, rather than really do culture, in my case (INT_02).*

In another neighborhood, the residents organized a theater play at a degraded cemetery. The NA representative described culture as a positive instrument to attract attention to problematic zones: "*the cemetery was being degraded, and we thought we could address it through something positive – rather than riots. So we give it a focus through arts*." (INT_21).

The neighborhood associations eventually became crucial entities for the transformation of local governance toward more horizontal and participatory, and they became recognized partners for local authorities. One NA representative described it as follows:

> *The city administration needs us; they need some feedback when they make plans, and they need someone to talk with. We are the intermediaries between citizens' voice and the city council. If some neighborhoods do not have associations, the city needs to spend their own resources to get some output. We know priorities, we can directly provide like 10 points, which are important, and other things that can wait… We have a broader helicopter view that the normal day-to-day inhabitant does not have time for. We realize we are an important media to provide direct access for information about what is happening in the city." (INT_02).*

Figure 5. *Map of neighborhoods with neighborhood associations, on March 2021.*



Note. Provided by the Riga City Development Department.

The new cultural strategy 2017–2030 builds on the concept of a neighborhood and sets the strategic priorities for the development of cultural services there. To achieve the development, the municipality aims to develop creative quarters and territories in Riga, which are supposed to improve the quality of neighborhood environments, strengthen local identity, and promote a sense of community (Riga City Council [Rīgas dome], 2017). In 2016, the Riga City Council established a funding program for creative quarters and territories. Legal entities, nongovernmental organizations, and private commercial companies can apply for financial support to organize cultural events that satisfy three criteria: create additional environmental aesthetics, involve public participation, and target one of the 58 neighborhoods. The financial support implies cofinancing of the projects with no more than 50% of the estimated costs and cannot exceed 10,000 euro (Riga City Council, 2016).

One of the representatives of the Riga City Council explained that the idea of creative quarters "was created to provide administrative help to the neighborhood NGOs, because otherwise it is impossible for them to cover salaries and rents." (INT_09). This again illustrates how important NAs are for the municipality as the main producers of cultural services in city neighborhoods and crucial actors for community development. In the most recent cultural strategy for 2017–2030, a special role is therefore given to NGOs: "NGOs played an important role in the ECoC 2014 program and had a long-term impact on the

development of communities, neighbourhoods and creative districts, as well as cultural policies at the state and municipal level" (Riga City Council [Rīgas dome], 2017, p. 11).

2.5.2.5. Improving inclusiveness of cultural strategy

During the ECoC, an innovative communication strategy for cultural programs was developed. The city had quite a strong infrastructure for highbrow cultural consumption, such as historical museums, art galleries, theater, and opera. However, these activities engaged only a small share of the population (INT_04). Moreover, cultural services were not spatially accessible to a large number of residents due to their concentration in the center and absence in residential areas (INT_14). Research on cultural consumption in Riga before the ECoC showed that only 15% of the population were active cultural consumers (Riga City Council [Rīgas dome], 2017). The ECoC Foundation decided that instead of targeting those 15%, the program should target the 85% who did not (actively) participate in cultural life (INT_14). Widening participation has become one of the key objectives throughout the event. This was achieved through offering diverse types of cultural activities, making most of the events ticket-free, and improving the communication strategy. For example, the pamphlets used popular language rather than art jargon to appeal to a broader audience; they also incorporated humor and illustrations to appeal to people's emotions and feelings. This approach to communication even caused certain dissatisfaction among the professional artists whose artworks were reformulated from professional art terminology into a simplified form (ibid.).

To conclude, this section illustrated how the emergent cultural strategy appeared to react to the conditions of economic crisis and urban shrinkage. The emergent strategy was initiated by cultural professionals from the ECoC Foundation and codeveloped with local residents, neighborhood associations, and public authorities. The involvement of local residents and neighborhood associations resulted in a place-sensitive, affordable, and inclusive approach that caters to local needs and utilizes locally available resources. The collaboration between the diverse actors resulted in the development of creative and experimental strategic visions and civic empowerment. The analysis revealed how the emergent strategy delivered successful results that were recognized by public authorities and triggered changes in the deliberate cultural strategy for 2017–2030.

2.6. Discussion and conclusion

In the last decade, research on cultural regeneration in declining areas has been shifting away from pro-growth models in pursuit of sustainable strategies. Recent studies have explored small-budget cultural strategies, community-led activities, locally sensitive cultural programs, and other schemes that could be more relevant for the specific conditions of shrinking cities (Della Spina et al., 2019; Grams & Warr, 2003; Heath et al., 2017; Joo & Hoon Park, 2017; Koizumi, 2015). This paper aimed to follow this debate and contribute to the literature that seeks more sustainable cultural strategies for shrinking cities (more affordable, socially oriented, and sensitive to local resources and needs).

First, we analyzed the impact of urban shrinkage on the cultural field. Due to the lack of a sufficient empirical base and limited data to establish the correlation, we developed several theory-driven assumptions. Then, based on the case study of Riga – a post-socialist capital city that lost over one third of its population – we investigated a) how the consequences of

urban shrinkage were addressed in the emergent and deliberate cultural strategies and b) what planning and governance instruments were used for this purpose. Our results revealed the following:

(1) From the theory, we found that urban shrinkage leads to a decline in the variety of cultural consumption, particularly in the highbrow arts. Thus, changes in cultural offers are required. In Riga, as a response to a low cultural consumption (only 15% of the population in 2008), the ECoC Foundation developed measures to improve cultural accessibility by not only widening local, popular, and amateur cultural offers but also adapting their cultural communication strategy to be more inviting for diverse social groups, including the disadvantaged and marginalized.

(2) Based on the literature, we conclude that urban shrinkage leads to cultural budget cuts and thus to declining numbers and quality of cultural services. In Riga, state and municipal cultural funding experienced significant cuts (by 42% and 49% respectively). The lack of investments hindered the construction of cultural "hardware" (infrastructure) and helped to bring the focus to cultural "software" (investment and support for cultural institutions and their activities). Sacco and Blessi (2009) argue that without supporting "software," investments in cultural infrastructure might result in a "dysfunctional 'cosmetic' character that is likely to exacerbate the critical aspects of urban transformation rather than tempering them" (p. 1115). However, the authors also argue that a careful balance between the physical and intangible components of cultural initiatives is required for efficient cultural development. The Riga case study demonstrates that a lack of physical public spaces in neighborhoods hinders the capacity of neighborhood associations and community participation. Therefore, a sufficient level of cultural physical infrastructure is needed as a base for cultural "software."

(3) Urban shrinkage results in an uneven (often centralized) distribution of cultural infrastructure services that reinforces sociospatial segregation. The city of Riga has faced this challenge: the majority of cultural institutions are located in the city center, while 65% of residential neighborhoods do not have any cultural institutions in their vicinity. The municipality selected cultural decentralization as one of the key priorities for cultural strategy. The spatial concept that divided the city into 58 neighborhoods was a tool that stimulated the decentralization process. Another tool involved the allocation of small funding schemes and the attraction of experts to improve the capacities of civic organizations.

(4) The theory suggests that while shrinking cities often emphasize the use of culture as a marketing and economic tool, they do not use it sufficiently to address negative social and mental consequences in shrinking cities. Riga's first cultural strategy placed strong emphasis on the development of a creative industries to generate financial returns, and it prioritized investors' and international tourists' interests. The successful emergent strategy during the ECoC allowed the municipality to realized that cultural policy can be effective in combination with other policies, such as social cohesion, civic participation, and community integration. This led to an expansion of the role of culture in the deliberate strategy by switching from an economized to a socially driven approach.

The second and third research questions aimed to explore what an alternative to pro-growth cultural strategy is, and how it is developed (i.e., with what planning or governance

instruments). The alternative cultural strategy analyzed in this paper is based on five elements supported by several implementation instruments, summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Elements of an alternative cultural strategy and instruments for their implementation.*

№	Elements of an alternative cultural strategy in shrinking cities	Implementation instruments
1	Shifting the focus from cultural "hardware" to cultural "software" – from large investments in cultural infrastructure to smaller investments in cultural institutions, their capacities, and social and identity assets	1. Allocation of funding schemes (financial competitions) for individual projects of cultural institutions.
2	Ensuring locally sensitive approach to cultural development	1. Promoting cultural development in smaller urban areas, such as city neighborhoods (based around cultural institutions, heritage, historical identity, etc.). 2. Conducting research to identify areas with limited access to cultural amenities. 3. Providing funding schemes for civic actors to realize their ideas in the neighborhoods. 4. Consulting with experts on improving the feasibility of bottom-up projects. 5. Engaging volunteers in the organization and implementation of projects.
3	Improving cultural decentralization	
4	Strengthening civic empowerment and participation	1. Promoting the idea of identity, a sense of belonging, and community building in smaller spatial areas. 2. Initiating project calls for cultural and civic activities in those areas. 3. Providing sufficient resources for the realization of civic projects (e.g., financial resources, knowledge and skills, physical working space).
5	Improving cultural inclusiveness for social groups prevailing in shrinking areas (e.g., the elderly, the poor, and the socially disadvantaged)	1. Conducting research on cultural participation and satisfaction with cultural services. 2. Expanding the range of ticket-free cultural activities. 3. Expanding the range of popular and amateur types of cultural offers and promoting local instead of international culture. 4. Adopting an inclusive communication strategy (strengthening visual and written languages). 5. Developing cultural services and amenities in residential areas in close physical vicinity to socially excluded groups (e.g., multifunctional cultural centers in the neighborhoods.

In the debate on shrinking cities, many authors advocate for a shift from a growth-oriented approach toward "shrinking smart" – moving the goal from reversing population decline to guaranteeing "quality of life that ensures the maintenance of the municipality as a pleasant place to live" (Panagopoulos & Barreira, 2012). Our study contributes to this argument. Even

though the urban development strategy in Riga is still based on predictions of demographic growth by facilitating return migration, resident retention, and support for families, the cultural strategy has been transitioning toward the "smart shrinkage" approach. Addressing the effects of urban shrinkage and economic crisis in Riga has resulted in a shift toward a more inclusive, socially driven, and locally sensitive cultural strategy.

The dominance of pro-growth planning strategies in shrinking cities reflects their stigmatization and local authorities' refusal to accept a shrinking pathway (Leo & Anderson, 2006). However, some scholars have argued that urban shrinkage can be the opportunity for cities to re-envision themselves as more livable and sustainable places that deliver a high quality of life for certain groups of the population (Blanco et al., 2009; Haase et al., 2012). This argument has been illustrated through the analysis of the Riga case study: even under conditions of severe urban shrinkage and economic crisis, cities can be the forerunners of innovative strategies for urban development. The severe local conditions in shrinking cities can be used as an opportunity to experiment with resource management, service provision, and civic engagement. This research illustrates that the emergent actions of civic actors can result in innovative and sustainable strategies. The emergent strategy of the ECoC delivered successful results, which were recognized by public authorities and stimulated changes in the deliberate cultural strategy. This became possible due to a) civic actors' sufficient organizational capacities to collaborate, experiment, and open the door to strategic learning; b) the resources allocated through the ECoC fund, and c) public authorities' ability to recognize the novel emergent patterns and anchor them in the deliberate strategy. Therefore, this study supports the idea that urban shrinkage offers planners and policymakers an opportunity to reimagine cities and the traditional principles on which planning practice has been based. Moreover, our research highlights the role of civic society's participation in coproducing public services and governance strategies. Opening the planning process to residents, NGOs, and cultural institutions provides local authorities with local knowledge and access to local resources and creativity, which stimulate innovative and place-sensitive solutions.

We adopted a longitudinal single-case-study research design to extensively explore an "actually existing" shrinking city and to investigate the alternative cultural strategy elements and tools in this specific context. However, this type of design has limitations that must be acknowledged. With a single-case study, the generalizability of findings is constrained: the case of Riga provides one particular example of an alternative cultural strategy in a post-socialist capital city; the findings reached in this study might thus not replicate in other contexts of shrinking cities. Further research on diverse cases of shrinking cities is hence needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the alternative cultural strategies, their elements, and tools for their implementations. Furthermore, additional empirical research is required to determine the impact of urban shrinkage on the cultural field, particularly in shrinking cities where there is access to longitudinal data on the accessibility of cultural services and infrastructure.

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2.8. Appendix – List of interviews

No.	Reference	Date	Type of organization
1	INT_01	28.10.2019	Representative of Riga City Council
2	INT_02	28.10.2019	Representative of a local neighborhood association, also a resident
3	INT_03	29.10.2019	Representative of the Latvian National Tourism Board
4	INT_04	31.10.2019	Representative of a local cultural NGO, also representative of European Capital of Culture Board
5	INT_05	01.11.2019	Representative of a local NGO
6	INT_06	28.08.2020	Representative of a local cultural NGO
7	INT_07	05.09.2020	Independent artist representative, who collaborates with the local NGO
8	INT_08	07.09.2020	Representative of Riga City Council
9	INT_09	07.09.2020	Representative of Riga City Council
10	INT_10	07.09.2020	Representative of Riga City Council
11	INT_11	07.09.2020	Representative of a local cultural NGO
12	INT_12	09.09.2020	Cultural manager representative
13	INT_13	14.09.2020	Private investor representative
14	INT_14	15.09.2020	Representative of Riga City Council (former employee), also representative of European Capital of Culture Board
15	INT_15	18.09.2020	Representative of a local urban design bureau
16	INT_16	18.09.2020	Representative of a local cultural NGO
17	INT_17	18.09.2020	Representative of a local cultural NGO, also representative of European Capital of Culture Board
18	INT_18	21.09.2020	Representative of an international cultural institute, located in Riga
19	INT_19	22.09.2020	Representative of a local neighborhood association, also a local activist
20	INT_20	12.10.2020	Representative of a local NGO
21	INT_21	05.05.2021	Representative of a local neighborhood association, also a resident

CHAPTER 3

How civil society organizations drive innovative cultural strategies in shrinking cities: A comparative case study of Oberhausen, Germany and Riga, Latvia

Abstract

In a context where planning strategies were conceived to accommodate urban growth, urban shrinkage urges scholars and practitioners to develop innovative approaches. This paper aims to explore the role of culture in qualitative transformations in shrinking cities. The focus of this analysis is governance networks with key actors, their resources, challenges, and mutual dependencies. In this comparative case study, the data was collected in a qualitative way via in-depth interviews with representatives of local governments and cultural NGOs, as well as politicians, private actors, and residents from neighborhood organizations. The results show that municipalities in shrinking cities lack crucial qualities such as creativity, trust, and knowledge of local communities to efficiently govern shrinking cities. Local governments increasingly rely on civil society organizations that utilize culture as a tool to innovate new methods for community development and to provide social services for vulnerable groups. Two approaches to governance through culture are presented which differ significantly between two shrinking cities: the economically prosperous Latvian capital, Riga, and a peripheral German city, Oberhausen, with one of the largest financial debts in the country. This paper debunks the image of shrinking cities as citadels of empty spaces for arts, emphasizes the role of strategic planning, highlights the crucial role of civil society organizations in civic engagement and maintenance of cultural provision, and reflects on their precarious position 'in the shadow of hierarchy.' Several policy implications for a community-focused cultural development of shrinking cities are provided.

3.1. Introduction

"Shrinking cities are here to stay," suggest future population trajectories of European cities [1]. Yet governance issues in depopulating municipalities are far from being re-solved. After decades of industrial growth, urban strategies for declining areas were simply absent. Over the last decade, with the proliferation of shrinking cities research, scholars and urban practitioners developed a few innovative ways to efficiently deal with the negative consequences of urban decline [2–6]. The problem is that those strategies cannot be easily borrowed as one-size-fits-all solutions [7]. Local governments need to modify them to fit unique local conditions [8]. To make strategies locally sensitive, governments require creativity, the ability to experiment, and the knowledge of local resources and residents' needs. While this knowledge is inherent to inhabitants, for governments alone its allocation is impeded due to the low level of civic engagement and residents' lack of trust in the governments of shrinking cities [9,10]. Besides, shrinking municipalities of-ten lose innovative capacity [11] and have little financial resources to spend on experiments that do not guarantee feasible results.

In my exploration of how local governments can innovate locally sensitive strategies, I turn to the potential of arts and culture. Culture and arts have been extensively used in shrinking areas, especially within post-industrial contexts. However, research exploring the possibilities of culture and arts in shrinking cities has not been exhaustive. In the majority of documented strategies, culture is utilized as a marketing and economic tool to re-verse urban growth [12,13]. Those publications appeared starting in 1990 and proliferated around 2005. They report on case studies of large metropolises and capital cities such as Manchester [14,15] and Glasgow [16–18], or medium-sized cities such as Bilbao [19], with the involvement of large investments from the market sector and national and European subsidies (such as European Capital of Culture [20]). A number of studies document how growth-oriented culture-led strategies can be hazardous to shrinking cities because they oftentimes gentrify neighborhoods, exacerbate social inequalities, and drain local budgets [15,19,21–25]. Studies also show that it is not the cultural catalyst alone that contributes to the cities' re-growth, but a complexity of contextual conditions such as the active involvement of the private sector, substantial municipal budgets to co-finance, and satisfactory air transport connectivity, among others [19]. When the entirety of factors is not met, cultural strategies fail and reinforce the 'vicious circle' of decline; however, those failed projects rarely appear in the literature [26]. This raises the question: What opportunities exist for using culture in urban and social processes in shrinking cities that do not rely on 'lucky' conditions, or that do not aim for economic growth but for 'smart shrinkage'? [27].

Shrinking cities' scholars promote alternative planning strategies as opposed to traditional economic development strategies [28,29], but not many studies documented examples of alternative cultural strategies in Europe (such as [30]). The few that exist portray single case studies from South Korea [31], Japan [32], and North America [33]. Comparative research on alternative cultural strategies in a European context can provide new in-sights into the role of culture in shrinking cities' strategies with sensitivity to local conditions. This comparative paper aims to contribute to the debate about the role of culture in shrinking cities, and to explore alternatives to economic growth models of cultural strategies. I ask: To what extent can culture be used to innovate strategies alternative to economic growth? And if those examples can be found, how are they governed in shrinking cities?

In order to investigate the governance of cultural strategies in shrinking cities, I use the theory of network governance as a theoretical lens. According to this theory, the in-creasing complexity and loosening conditions created by urban shrinkage increase the reliance of governments on other types of actors and opens up opportunities for new methods of functioning. I aim to understand the role of culture in shaping the networks of co-operation (or competition) in shrinking cities. I explore the challenges of the actors in-volved, their capacities and resources, and how these actors mutually reinforce governance dependencies to deliver alternative cultural strategies. Studies on shrinking cities largely promote the role of civil society. However, shrinking cities' scholars often view civil society as a homogeneous group. While referring to civil society as a heterogeneous entity, this study elaborates on the role of civil society organizations (primarily socio-cultural centers and non-governmental organizations) that have been lacking attention in the literature on shrinking cities.

This research is based on a comparative case study design. I selected two cases—Riga and Oberhausen. Both of these locations represent post-industrial shrinking cities with a long-term population decline, yet they have contrasting characteristics that make their comparison interesting. Riga, the large capital city of Latvia with a municipal budget sur-plus, is contrasted to the medium-sized peripheral town of Oberhausen, a town possessing one of the largest budget debts in Germany.

The cultural policy of shrinking cities is one of the most 'marginalized' policy areas. As cities shrink, local authorities seek to reduce the costs of public services that are not considered essential (such as healthcare or education) or profitable (such as energy or ICT). Culture is often considered 'nice to have' and not an essential policy area. For example, in some countries such as Germany, cultural policy is a voluntary task for local municipalities. Since it is not legally required, a budget for cultural provision is not secured [34]. Thus, the cultural budget in shrinking cities is usually cut first. It is valuable to explore how the cultural sector survives in the precarious conditions of shrinking cities, and who maintains this sector.

3.2. Creativity, experimentation, and trust: Essential resources to design locally sensitive strategies in shrinking cities

Studies on shrinking cities emphasize that local governments need efficient governance methods and planning instruments to deal with the consequences of urban shrink-age. Even though a number of such strategies have been developed by scholars and urban practitioners [2–6], they cannot be borrowed as one-size-fits-all solutions in other contexts. Local governments need to modify existing strategies to fit the local context, with its political, economic, geographical, and social nuances. Haase et al., portray how many different forms urban shrinkages can take and how important it is to understand the context in "determining the outcomes of seemingly similar macro-developments" [7] (p. 14). To make strategies locally sensitive, governments require a local understanding of the needs of the local population and of the resources of the territory and community. While this knowledge is inherent to inhabitants, for governments alone it takes a lot of time and re-sources to identify. This increases the demand for local governments to engage civil society in policy and planning, and to develop trust and collaborative relations with residents [35].

Besides, innovating or tailoring planning strategies to a local context requires unique skills such as creativity and innovation, as well as resources to experiment (to spend on projects that do not guarantee feasible results). Studies show that governments in shrinking cities lose innovative capacity and knowledge [11]. A lack of qualified personnel is one reason; municipalities in shrinking cities struggle to employ qualified professionals be-cause of budget deficits and a phenomenon called 'selected outmigration' [11,36], where more educated and qualified people tend to emigrate. The ability to experiment is also hindered because it requires financial resources and the right to 'waste' them on making mistakes to produce new knowledge. Furthermore, creativity and the ability to experiment are generally impeded within a rigid bureaucratic culture even in the governments of growing cities [37]. This constellation of conditions creates a serious challenge for local governance. On the one hand, governance innovations are urgently needed that are low-cost, yet efficient and sensitive to local needs. On the other hand, governments struggle to develop innovative solutions because they lack sufficient resources, knowledge, and capabilities to do it alone. That is why the missing qualities of local administrations need to be allocated elsewhere, which can be done via the other actors in governance networks [38].

3.3. The role of network governance in stimulating innovative capacity

Network governance can be defined as an increased reliance on social systems out-side of bureaucratic structures to mobilize lacking qualities in order to address social problems in uncertain and complex contexts (own definition based on [39]). Network governance leads to new structured patterns of interaction between actors and new flows of resources between them [40]. Structured means that these relations are not random, but intentionally constructed in order to produce feasible solutions. Scholars argue that the complexity and urgency of tasks that governments face today require a "broader array of administrative skills, extending beyond those associated with direct government bureaucracy" [41] (p. 33). Thus, the role of administrators is shifting from neutral non-political actors to coordinators of a complex system of governing actors [42]. In shrinking cities, the new structural conditions and vacuum of ideas create 'loose spaces', meaning that there are more opportunities for informal processes and transformative changes to occur [41]. In such 'loose spaces,' a government can no longer be independent; thus, they enable non-traditional actors to play around with ideas and produce innovations. However, in order for innovations to happen, local governments need to transform their role from bureaucrats to social entrepreneurs who rely on "experimentation, collaboration, openness, imagination, and unconstrained creativity" [41] (p. 37).

3.3.1. Culture in shrinking cities and cultural actors in governance networks

In shrinking cities, culture and arts are often portrayed as resources that gain power in the hands of the market. Culture-led regeneration has been a common response of public-private partnerships to fight against urban shrinkage, especially in post-industrial cities that lost their identities and functions to a large amount of spaces [16,18,43,44]. After the well-known 'Bilbao effect', market actors and local governments have been dazzled by the potential of culture to promote a new economic base and reverse urban growth [11,12].

However, only a few studies showcase alternative examples to economic-based cultural strategies in shrinking contexts [2,30–33]. Those alternative strategies utilize culture and arts as soft tools for civic engagement and empowerment, social cohesion, and identity building; these strategies invite cultural actors as partners that possess creativity, the ability to experiment, and trustful relationships with local communities.

For example, Koizumi [32] documents a Japanese case where the artists were valued not as a creative class that attracts economic growth, but as community facilitators and instigators of creative activity. Another case study on the South Korean city of Busan emphasizes the role of the cultural actors in proposing a new collaborative governance model for urban regeneration involving government, property owners, and artists: "local building owners were asked to lower their rents. Artists were asked to put some investments in for necessary renovation, while their rents were subsidized by the government" [31] (p. 854). A previously failed government's attempt to develop a cultural district and lack of ideas created a 'loose space' for this new model to be accepted. The cultural leaders had the freedom to implement their vision because they proposed a cost-effective way to achieve quick results with low risks for the government. The idea was to promote the in-tangible values of the district (e.g., history, creativity) in order to bring liveliness into the old downtown through fostering community engagement and social and human capital. Soon after, physical regeneration followed, and cultural policy was transformed. This pa-per highlights that cultural actors have the capacity to initiate transformative change in policy and urban planning. The author says that the success of this project was based on the "artists' social network and community engagement," as well as the government's position as "a passive supporter" [31].

3.3.2. Civil society organizations in the governance network of shrinking cities

Researchers document diverse forms of governance collaborations in shrinking cities: public-private partnerships [45], public sector and civil society [46], state-market-civil society collaborations [47], and private-citizen partnerships, which are known as 'governance without government' and are considered a common phenomenon in shrinking cities [41]. Shrinking cities scholars speak in agreement that the involvement of civil society in governance, planning, and policy-making is necessary to design solutions to overcome the negative consequences [2,3]. However, studies often perceive civil society as a homogeneous entity, mixing formal civil society organizations and local inhabitants [48].

Local inhabitants have knowledge about local resources and local needs, which is necessary for making efficient urban development strategies. They also possess the time and physical capacity to co-produce public services, which results in low-cost solutions for municipalities [49]. However, existing research found that in shrinking cities, the ability of local inhabitants to participate is hindered by selective outmigration [50,51], declined social capital [10], and a pessimistic vision toward the city's future [52]. Contrastingly, non-profit and non-governmental organizations (or the third sector [53]) rise in prominence in weak urban economies such as shrinking cities [11,54]. Increased interdependency between these actors leads to the so-called 'third-party government' [48] and al-lows local governments to allocate resources to enhance efficiency, creativity, and innovation [38].

There are several reasons for local governments to collaborate with the third sector. The first one is the inability of local authorities to ensure the provision of public services, in which case the civil society organizations become "an extension of a local authority" [38] (p. 11) to satisfy the unmet demands of public services [55]. Another reason to rely on the third sector is to reinforce civic participation and enhance civil society. Research shows that the nonprofit sector often possesses a higher level of public trust [55], and has extensive knowledge of the social and cultural characteristics of the place where they work, which strengthens their relationships with local communities. Besides having the necessary skills and human resources, non-governmental actors can bring in financial re-sources such as private capital, leading to the so-called 'public-private-philanthropic partnerships' [56]. The non-political status of non-governmental organizations is valuable because they provide services "that [otherwise] would encounter tough political resistance were they offered through governmental agencies" [54] (p. 30). The above-mentioned capital of the third sector provides substantial support for governments in austerity, like shrinking municipalities. In return, local governments often play a crucial role in promoting and supporting the innovative activity of the third sector [57] by offering "staff secondments and training, accommodation, equipment, low-interest loans, legal and ad-ministrative advice, or tax relief" [38] (p. 11).

3.4. Methods and study setting

3.4.1. Study setting

Oberhausen

Oberhausen is a medium-sized city in the Ruhr Metropolitan region—a polycentric urban area in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. Historically, it is an unusual city because it developed only in the modern day around coal mines and steel mills, with the construction of the Cologne-Minden railway station. During industrial times, Oberhausen experienced high economic growth and reached its economic peak in 1959, accumulating the production of 8.4% of all German steel [58]. In 1963, the city reached its demographic peak with 261,500 inhabitants [58]. In 1968, the closure of the Concordia colliery indicated the beginning of the coal, steel, and mining crises. Economic restructuring, together with declining birth rates, led to persistent urban shrinkage (Figure 1). The withdrawal of industries was perceived as a loss of Oberhausen's economic core function. Since 1985, Ober-hausen has had one of the highest financial debts in Germany. Financial debt is typical for old industrial regions due to high social spending and low tax revenues, and can hardly be counteracted without assistance [59]. The share of population over 65 in Oberhausen is 21% (in 2019). Additionally, Oberhausen is the city with the highest national unemployment rate—10.4% in 2021, compared to the national average of 5.7% [60]; since 2018, the city has had one of the highest percentages of population with migration background (over 30%) [61].

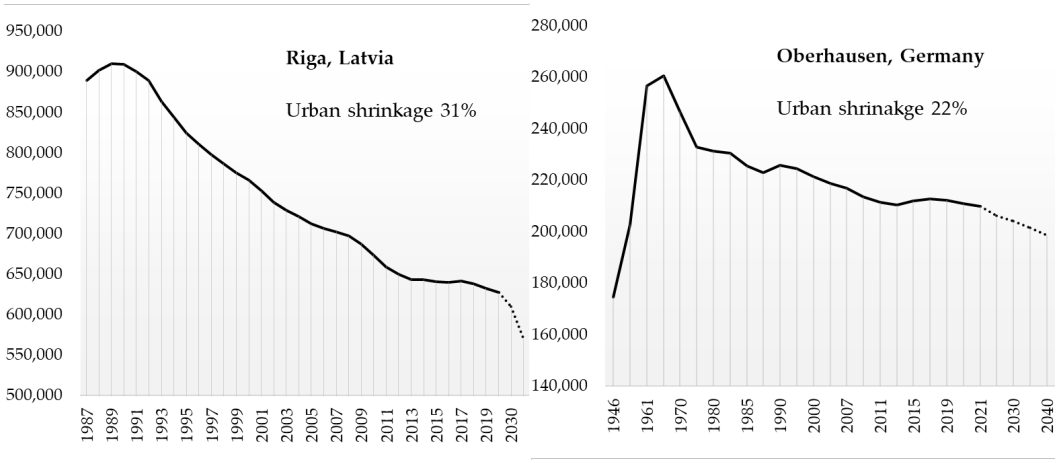

Figure 1. Population trajectory in Riga (left) and Oberhausen (right). Source Riga: Own representation based on Official Statistics of Latvia & ref. [62]. Source Oberhausen: Own representation based on Landesbetrieb für Information und Technik, NRW; RVR-Datenbank [RVR-Database of State Office for Information and Technology, North Rhine-Westphalia] & ref. [61].

Riga

Riga is the capital of Latvia and was founded in 1201. Riga is a primate city of Latvia, meaning that it is disproportionally larger than any other city in Latvia [63]. At the beginning of 2022, 671.9 thousand people lived in Riga, which is almost one-third of the total Latvian population [64]. In Riga, 21% of the inhabitants are people aged 65 and older [65]. The unemployment rate in Riga is 4.5%, which is lower than the national average of 6.7% [64]. The city plays a tremendous role in the Latvian economy, employment market, and investments. In 2021, municipal budget revenue amounted to 984,8 million euros, while budget expense was 960,2 million euros [64]. Due to its capital status, Riga is home to important state, municipal, and private cultural institutions, with the city center being a UNESCO World Heritage site [2]. In the 19th century, Riga experienced rapid industrialization and urbanization with the formation of industrial areas around the city center and intensive residential construction caused by the significant population growth. During the Soviet era, industries expanded. During the first half of the 1990s, Latvia passed through a transitional period from a totalitarian to a democratic society that brought crucial political, economic, social, and demographic changes. Since 1989, the city has been steadily shrinking and lost almost 31% of its population (Figure 1). The population decline in Riga occurred in 3 waves: the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 2004 EU accession and the free movement of workers, and the 2009 economic crisis [62]. Today, Riga is the main Latvian destination for international migrants; in 2020, the index of migration balance in the city was 4.5—significantly higher than the national average of 1.8. Still, the largest national groups in Riga are Latvians (48%) and ethnic Russians (35%) [64,66,67].

3.4.2. Research design

This research is based on a comparative case study methodology within the interpretive epistemology [68], which is based on intersubjectivity and the assumption that social reality is not objective but is shaped by the complexity of social contexts, human experiences, and knowledge systems. Within this epistemological paradigm, I follow the holistic strategy of

comparative analysis proposed by Pickvance [69] rather than the variable-oriented strategy. Instead of viewing cultural strategy-making as a set of variables, I see it as a whole, yet acknowledge nuanced and intricate details.

I acknowledge that two case studies have similarities and contrasting characteristics. In terms of similarities, the cases are post-industrial cities, whose loss of core economic function might have triggered loss of urban identity. For such cities, culture presents a valuable resource [70,71], and is used more commonly than in shrinking cities triggered by, for instance, natural disasters. Additionally, I focus on cities with long-term demographic decline in the past and expected continued decline in the future. These conditions might indicate that urban shrinkage is more likely to be accepted as a new planning model in official discourse and lead to innovative strategies focused specifically on urban shrinkage. Figure 1 illustrates past and future trajectories of population change in Riga and Oberhausen.

The cases also have contrasting characteristics. Riga is a capital 'prosperous shrinking city' [72] with a budget surplus, and Oberhausen is a peripheral city that accumulated one of the largest financial debts in Germany [73]. Riga represents a post-socialist city in the country with young democracy [74] and contrasts against a western European city with a so-called 'mature' democracy and a comparatively long history of a social democratic regime. Post-socialist cities are often characterized by the weak agency of local authorities in planning decisions and strong agency of private interests [23,75], which might lead to cultural strategy being more influenced by private sector. Contrarily, in a social democratic context with strong welfare state support, the approach to culture might be more likely public- and non-profit-led. Research by Burksiene et al. [74] reveals that in young democracies, non-governmental actors constitute the base for cultural and economic development because local municipalities often "lack important skills in project activities in fostering trade and investments" (p. 326).

3.4.3. Data collection method

I collected data through in-depth interviews in both cities over the course of three years. In-depth interviews were used to get deeper understanding of the role of culture in urban development of shrinking cities and grasp the nuanced perspectives of different types of stakeholders on their role in governance networks. In Riga, I conducted 21 inter-views between October 2019 and September 2020. In Oberhausen, I conducted 15 inter-views between May and August 2021 and June and August 2022. The types of interview stakeholders are presented in Table A1 in Appendix A. The core interviewees were identified via the desk research as actors who have been actively involved in cultural and urban activities. Further interviewees were recruited via the networking technique where the interviewed actors suggested other actors who they think are crucial in cultural and urban development in the city. The interviews were semi-structured. The pre-defined questions clustered around the following topics: the perception of urban shrinkage through experiences of individuals or organizations; the challenges that actors experience in achieving their individual or organizational goals; the strengths that help them overcome the challenges; their experiences in collaborating with other actors; and their ideas on the role of culture in urban development of the city.

The second source of data was strategic and policy documents from both cities (see Table A2 in Appendix A). In Riga, I analyzed urban planning long-term and mid-term strategies, and cultural strategies. In Oberhausen, not many formal planning strategies exist. I analyzed one long-term planning strategy. Oberhausen does not currently have a separate cultural strategy or policy. A helpful data source about the cultural development of Oberhausen was the open access online system (ALLRIS) with published reports from the City Council's Cultural Committee. They usually took place six times a year and contained minutes, discussions, and decisions for the period from 2003 to 2022.

3.4.4. Data analysis method

I analyzed the interviews using Atlas.ti. I used pre-determined code categories (such as actors, resources, and governance challenges). Additionally, I used the open coding technique to identify subcodes of the predefined categories and other code categories. After coding, I built coding networks around the two actors that emerged to be the main players who utilized culture in urban and community development in shrinking cities: the NGO sector and the local municipality. I used the function 'code co-occurrence table,' which shows the co-occurrence coefficient between the codes which indicates the strength of the relation between them. I included only the codes with co-occurrence coefficients of 0.03 and higher. After conducting multiple co-occurrence tests, I subjectively chose this threshold because it best represents the data.

3.5. Results

3.5.1. Exploring governance capacities of municipalities and non-governmental actors in the cultural field

In this section, I describe the results of the networks of governance in the cultural field in two cities, Riga and Oberhausen. The main result of my analysis is that NGOs and the municipality are the key stakeholders who contribute to urban and community development via the utilization of cultural elements such as theatre, music, cuisine, dance, literature, murals, and sculpture. The networks show that both the municipality and the NGO sector collaborate with the same set of actors including each other, citizens, and the private sector. The only difference is that the municipality also collaborates with (in this case financially supports) formal cultural institutions, which include theatres, museums, libraries, opera houses, music halls, and other institutions financed from local, regional, or state funds. It must be mentioned that this analysis considers only co-occurrences between the two codes, but does not allow for analysis of multivariate relations, and thus does not consider mediation between codes. However, from the data, it is evident that the NGO sector is an important mediator between a municipality and its citizens. I elaborate on this in the next section.

NGOs and municipalities face quite a different set of governance challenges. NGOs struggle with the lack of space and stable financial resources, which causes high uncertainty for their existence:

> *"The situation is all the time very precarious for all my colleagues. We probably at one moment have to shrink, then we can grow. We don't have these permanent job agreements, we have these yearly agreement, and then we can see... All of them, it*

could be, will be interrupted in one moment but that's how we live for 20 years." (Riga, Interview 2019)

Additionally, following bureaucratic procedures is a difficult task for cultural NGOs: for example, developing funding applications or filing financial reports after receiving municipal funding. In the interview below, the leader of a neighborhood association in Riga explains how a lack of financial resources led to a shortage of human resources who can invest in time-consuming bureaucratic tasks. This vulnerable situation of third-sector organizations, associated with scarcity of funding and shortage of volunteers, has been previously documented in young democracies such as Baltic states [38]:

> *"We don't have a stable [financial] source, and […] mainly it depends on the human re-sources to do the application process. It's somewhat exhausting and you need to have time to work on your computer and write these project application letters and fill in forms afterwards, financial management and response to municipality that explains how you spend the money and so on. And people, if they have jobs, they don't have much time, and also not everyone has this experience and knowledge how to do it. […] For the last two years we didn't apply [for a funding tender], because it was just me who was doing these applications, and since I was having a baby and also had a lot of professional work, I didn't have time, and there wasn't a person who could take it on."* (Riga, Interview 2020)

Municipal employees in shrinking cities have an even higher number of challenges compared to the NGO sector. These are the lack of civic participation and lack of collaborations (between organizations and between the department within the municipality), le-gal constraints, and strategic challenges. The lack of financial resources and lack of creativity were the biggest challenges for Oberhausen. According to German law, a municipality cannot go bankrupt. However, in the situation of a long-lasting debt, they can go 'quasi-bankrupt,' which means that the municipality becomes controlled by the state authority [in German: Bezirksregierung], and receives only the money they need to fulfill their legal tasks such as social care, education, or housing. As a result, the municipality hires only the minimum staff they need to fulfill the legally required tasks. Because cultural policy is a non-mandatory task for German municipalities, personnel in the cultural sector is in shortage. In Oberhausen, the challenge is also in the particular social structure which resulted from urban shrinkage with a 'huge lack of young people, students, creative people, urban planners'; 'high number of immigrants, which is difficult to work with many different cultural backgrounds they have'; 'increasing number of older people'; and a 'high number of unemployed for a long time'. In Riga, the municipality employees are more concerned with the lack of trust between the inhabitants and the municipality. Interestingly, the bureaucratic system and the red tape were commonly mentioned as barriers by municipal employees because they constrain collaborations with organizations and inhabitants.

Organizations can overcome existing challenges if they possess the relevant set of re-sources. NGOs overcome high instability by learning how to win competitions for sub-national funding. NGOs also have social capital; they rely on volunteers who support their organizational goals, or close friends with intrinsic motivation. For example, one leader of a cultural NGO shared: "We always had friends around us, in every field. If we needed a static and electric engineer, we had friends. We had a very strong network, even without paying they were going with us." Another important resource of the NGOs is their ability to come

up with creative and innovative ideas, which is often a crucial resource for winning external funding, as explained by the employee of a cultural center in Oberhausen:

> *"At the end we have many quite innovative projects, and that's what they [funding bodies] are looking for at the end. Because they want to do pilot projects. And each of these 10 different projects [within the international consortium they are part of] are pilot projects, so they're looking 'okay what is new, what can you replicate in other cities'. And it's often what is wanted."* (Oberhausen, Interview 2022)

For municipalities, their strengths are based on their legitimate status and access to space and finances (yet with certain constraints, which are discussed in the next section). The following quote from the employer of the cultural department illustrates this:

> *"[...] If you're not getting money from the city and you're [name of the cultural NGO] going on your own, [you need to] find your place, open some doors, then you're like 'ah, those crazy artists'. When we started to finance them from Riga city, from cultural department, everybody have to think 'ah, financed by Riga city—cultural department', and then it's different category."* (Riga, Interview 2019)

In Riga, the municipality also benefits from access to financial resources that they attract through supra-national funding.

When the actors cannot address their challenges with internal resources, they seek them from external actors and form a governance network. In the next section, I discuss the processes of entering into a collaboration between civil society organizations and municipalities in Riga and Oberhausen.

3.5.2. Overcoming governance challenges through networks in the cultural field

3.5.2.1. Oberhausen

Riga and Oberhausen show different approaches to urban and community development through cultural participation and to forming governance networks with cultural actors. In Oberhausen, the main governance challenge is the lack of financial resources. When local government does not have internal financial resources, the main task becomes attracting external funding from regional, national, or supra-national bodies, which makes them dependent upon external agendas [3,76]. Oberhausen shows an extreme example of this case; in such a precarious economic situation, the city has no resources to develop a new urban strategy to guide urban development (the urban strategy that the city has now is outdated and expired in 2020). In the absence of a comprehensive urban strategy, the urban development department applies for any potential funding opportunity despite many not fitting the city's needs.

> *"Department of urban renewal are writing proposals for funding. All the time. […] we are very dependent on funding. […] That makes it hard to bring all those projects together. I think it makes it hard for strategic projects. If there is money from external [funding], we have to get these."* (Oberhausen, Interview 2022)

Seeking external funding without a comprehensive strategic vision in Oberhausen has resulted in a paradoxical situation—the successfully obtained funds set further priori-ties for

the city strategy (not the other way around), "the only funding that we're getting right now is the national and state funding for smart cities. We're getting a lot of money for smart city, there is also a strategy we worked on, the development in the next years in the context of smart city" (Oberhausen, Interview 2022). Besides, strategic planners in Oberhausen do not recognize culture as a resource for urban planning or community building. In fact, the employees I interviewed were unaware of the activities of the cultural non-governmental organizations active in urban development on the grassroots level in their own city.

While the Strategic Team of Urban Development Department is not collaborating with cultural actors, the Department of Culture of the Oberhausen City Council actively engages with them. In fact, the employees of the Department of Culture admit their lack of finances and personnel to provide cultural services; thus, they rely on non-governmental organizations to take over the municipality's functions to address shrinking problems, such as a lack of resources and residents' outmigration:

> *"The only hope is work from the NGOs to build networks to attract people from other cities. Municipality has almost nothing for culture. […] We are the only middle-sized city without university. Really, the only one here in this Ruhr area. This means we have a huge lack of young people, students, creative people, urban planners, people who would come here and do something. So, the only hope is actually the work from NGOs. To get these people here, because there is no other way to get them here, why would they come here? There is no offer for them to work here. […] What the municipality has is super low, actually, it's almost nothing. The only hope is from EU projects. The dilemma is that I'm the only person working in one of these [external] projects, half-time. We need so many more people, in other like city planning department, for instance, they have none."* (Oberhausen, Interview 2021)

With many local problems and the government's inability to resolve them, local cultural NGOs step in. They work with civil society to accommodate their needs. Cultural NGOs in Oberhausen allocate external resources from national and European bodies to invest in policy priorities related to the integration of migrants, education, re-skilling and training refugees, and the assistance of the long-term unemployed. For example, the foundation Kunsthaus Mitte works in the intersection of arts and social work. Their two main long-term projects are the Arbeitslosen-Ballett [the Ballet of the Unemployed] and "Brauchse Jobb? Wir machen Kunst!" [Need a job? We make art!]. These projects aim to offer temporary jobs for unemployed people, providing them with official contacts, salaries, and social security. It is open not only to artists but to anyone wishing to participate and contribute in their own way.

Another project from the cultural NGO 'Kitev,' called Free University, is a citizen-to-citizen university platform funded by the state program. Oberhausen is the only middle-sized city in the Ruhr region that does not have a university. Kitev recognized the need for one and decided to organize their own faculties, where citizens offer courses to others in something they have expertise in; for example, street art, theatre improvisation, songwriting, calligraphy, or gardening. It is free and open to everyone. The teachers of the courses can receive remuneration in the amount of 1,000 euros. The project contributes to education and re-skilling, as well as social bonding in the community. Additionally, it strengthens civic empowerment by providing opportunities and financial, professional, and moral support for those who want to become a teacher. Often, these roles are taken by migrants, refugees, unemployed, or elderly people.

The municipality forms good informal relations with NGOs and tries to support them by different means. The municipality offers assistance with bureaucratic processes and co-financing to compete for external funding, "sometimes you have to pay 10 or 20 percent to get the money from the state, we help them by that 10 or 20 percent, so that they can make things and can finance them" (Oberhausen, Interview 2021). The municipality is also able to provide space to cultural NGOs, but such cases are rare because empty properties in ownership of the municipality are scarce. The problem is well-illustrated by one of the leaders of a cultural NGO in Oberhausen:

> *"Even if the city wants to initiate something that helps the city to develop, or not to die, they need the cooperation with private people or companies, to do it in these places. And that's very tricky. The city doesn't own anything here, where we could do projects, which helped the city to develop in one or another way. Most of the houses here are owned by companies that are not in Oberhausen, they [are] sometimes not even in Europe, so they don't care at all what's going on in the city. […]. They just own it [the buildings] because they can make Abschreibung [German for tax write-off]. They have a house, it doesn't bring profit, it only makes minus and it's good for their taxes."* (Oberhausen, Interview 2021)

However, the municipality tries to mobilize its informal connections to access spaces through market actors: "if they are searching for a place, the municipality can go and talk to the owner, make connections, this is what works very well" (Oberhausen, Interview 2021). Formal municipal support to NGOs consists of small amounts of regular yearly funding; in 2022 each of the cultural NGOs received between 20,000 and 30,000 euros.

3.5.2.2. Riga

In Riga, the situation is different because the city has a budget surplus, as well as a comprehensive and regularly updated urban development strategy. In 2022, the Riga City Council has approved a new mid-term strategy for 2022–2027, which anchors the new approach to cultural development. There, culture is the main tool for strengthening the identity of the city and its neighborhoods in order to enhance community development and civic participation. To understand the place, the municipality relies on the knowledge of local communities. This understanding exists within the different departments of the city council, in the department of strategic planning: "*…they understand better than us, what they need in neighborhoods*" (Riga, Interview 2019), as well as in the department of culture: "*we wanted to promote people feeling belonging to the neighborhood, because they [locals] see the problems and solutions better"* (Riga, Interview 2019).

In 2019, Riga has become a participant in a Baltic States project based on testing the methods of cultural planning. The project was led by the department of strategic planning. The strategic department became the main proponent of culture as a tool for urban and community development. They see culture as:

> *"A process, which helps us to understand the local specific characteristics, to better know people, the area, and to build future developments, both infrastructure and social developments related to those local resources. […] if we look at culture as a process then usually it helps us to bring to the front some challenges or some important issues."* (Riga, Interview 2020)

In this project, the strategic planning department collaborates with artists and cultural NGOs because they see them as community drivers: "*… they are part of a geographical community in neighborhoods, they make social work and make identity for neighborhood*", and as experts within the specific local area: *"they are very into their own community, they are professionals, but to the specific [Name omitted] community"* (Riga, Interview 2020). The main idea to work with artists and cultural NGOs was to develop new governance methods of how to engage with neighborhood communities. For developing such methods, experimentation and flexibility are crucial because this allows for the discovery of relevant forms to work with diverse target groups, such as the unemployed, socially isolated, and elderly people. Besides, experimenting allows for adaptation to the fast-changing environmental, social, economic, and demographic conditions that shrinking cities face.

One project where the municipality invited artists to collaborate took place in the Sarkandaugava neighborhood, which struggled with a post-industrial stigma, lack of identity, spatial and social segregation, as well as deteriorating industrial sites in need of new functions. The leader of the project was the cultural NGO 'Free Riga' because they had previous experience with the regeneration of empty properties into cultural temporary-use spaces. Initially, Free Riga and the municipality aimed for an ambitious project to not only strengthen community building but also find a function for a privately-owned industrial site and transform it into spaces where citizens gather, meet, and organize social events. Quickly after the start, Free Riga found that the industrial land was contaminated, and the resources available for the project were not enough to clean the territory. As a result, the project was moved to a different smaller building; however, after the COVID-19 outbreak, it had to be changed again into a contactless event. 'Free Riga' decided to pro-duce a newspaper about local residents and their hobbies in order to organize local hobby groups for neighbors to get to know each other, and meet to practice hobbies together. Even though the initial idea was not realized, the strategic planning department showed a positive attitude to the unexpected changes because they prioritized the value of building trust with neighbors and cultural actors and learned from their experiments about innovative community-activation methods:

> *"[…] when we didn't get this [industrial] building, then Oscar [the leader of cultural NGO, name changed] said "but I have idea. I will do that". I was like yes. What else could I say to him? No? Of course, we're experimenting, we're going further, and that's the way. That's how I am personally looking at both of these projects, and it's how I'm communicating it to my colleagues. That's it is experimentation, that it is innovation, and we don't have to be scared of not reaching the results, cause we don't know what the result is. And that's the process."* (Riga, Interview 2020)

This attitude of trust, flexibility, and prioritizing intangible over feasible results is not common for shrinking cities. What stimulated it in Riga was the capacity of the urban planners to be open to new ways of work, but also the opportunity of the city to participate in an international project of cultural planning, which gave access to a wide international network of experts, and to the external EU funding to be able to implement these experiments.

The municipality in Riga established formal tools to support cultural NGOs. One of these is funding tenders to provide direct subsidies. Among other financial tenders for festivals, amateur groups, or private actors, the city developed a special tender for the support of Riga's creative quarters and territories. An employee from the Cultural Department ex-

plains: "*this program is more to help NGOs administratively, because in most competitions it is impossible for them to receive a salary or funding for rent of their premises. But we conceived this program for them, and for an interesting cultural program [of the city]*" (Riga, Interview 2020 [Translated into English by author]). Within this tender, the NGOs could get a small amount of funding—up to 10.000 euros per year. To support non-governmental organizations and neighborhood associations, the city of Riga has established an NGO house. It provides physical space for organizations to meet colleagues, work, and organize events:

> *"NGOs can come […] to organize different activities for people, or even just to ensure that they can work, for example have a place for meetings, for people who want to establish NGO, or for NGO who is small and doesn't have a place to work with computers. Also to have a place to organize different activities for inhabitants. […] Till now there are different rooms for work, for example, a computer room, a meeting room with a table and chairs, different seminar/conference rooms with equipment, and also hall for bigger events, like concerts or forums, with all equipment. All this equipment is free for NGOs to use. Other parts of NGO house work is to provide informative and consultative support, for example there are regular seminars on different topics like accounting, project management. Also NGOs can get some consultation from our workers, for example, how the City Council work, or how competition work."* (Riga, Interview 2020)

The NGO house is popular among NGOs, but it doesn't meet the high demand. Additionally, the interviews revealed that not all NGOs use it because for some it is inconveniently located and is difficult to find availability within the 'fully booked' capacity.

Similar to Oberhausen, access to affordable spaces is constrained for NGOs in Riga, but due to legal reasons. The municipality does not own spaces that can be occupied by cultural NGOs. According to Latvian privatization policy, the municipality is not allowed to keep long-term ownership of empty buildings that are not in the direct use of public institutions. This law impedes the local government's ability to help cultural NGOs gain access to affordable or free spaces. This law creates a situation where a large share of abandoned properties belongs to private actors, which impedes the municipality's ability to address the problem.

3.5.3. The ambivalent role of the private sector

The substantial share of studies on culture in shrinking cities emphasize the important role of the private sector in urban governance networks [4,45]; however, my analysis shows that even though private actors appear in the collaboration networks of both municipalities and NGOs, their role within the cultural sector is rather weak. In relation to the municipality, both case studies show that public-private partnerships are not active in the cultural field in shrinking cities. In Oberhausen, private actors are rarely involved in collaborations with the municipality: "*It [collaborations with private sector] is not so easy like in towns with a big economy, and with many people with much money.*" (Oberhausen, Inter-view 2021). In Riga, however, private actors used to be important philanthropic sponsors for civil society organizations. However, interviews reveal that in recent years, the role of private philanthropists has been declining due to economic and legal reasons:

"Actually at one moment there were many of those private mecenats and supporters like ABLV bank, which collapsed, then Teterev foundation, which has also collapsed, and Boris Teterev just passed away, just a month ago. And then, for example, Zuzāns, who is running this gambling company and is one of the main supporter of art in Latvia, like private supporter. But his business is now reduced because of new legal system, so he also I think will stop to do it. So all these private players, which at one moment were quite many in the scene, they're dropping out for different reasons." (Riga, Interview 2019)

On the other hand, as illustrated earlier, private actors impede the accessibility of spaces necessary for the operation of cultural civil society organizations. According to the study results, the privatization of urban spaces is one of the main challenges of the NGO sector in the cultural field, both in Riga and Oberhausen.

3.6. Discussions

Applying the theoretical framework of network governance, I explored governance networks of actors that tackle urban shrinkage challenges with cultural and artistic tools. The collaboration between civil society organizations and municipalities differs in the two cities (see Figure 2): in Riga, culture appears to be the 'soft' governance tool for empowering local communities and involving them in urban processes, and leads to novel methods of community development. However, in Oberhausen, culture is recognized by a part of a municipality as a tool for social and cultural service provision.

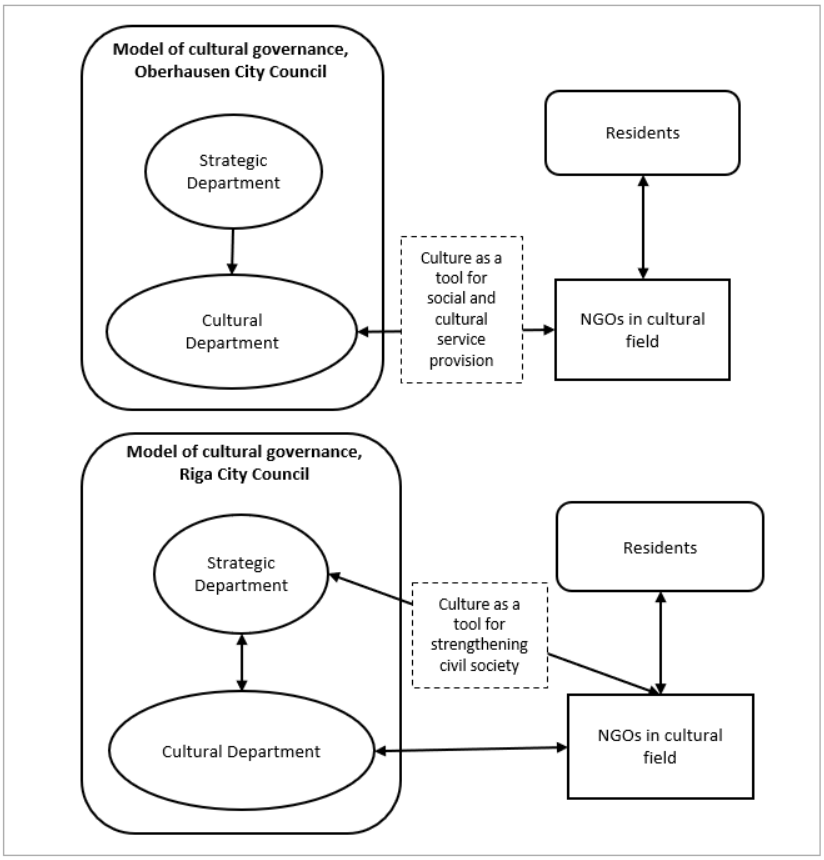

Figure 2. Schematic illustration of cultural governance models in Riga and Oberhausen.

Riga and Oberhausen differ in recognition of culture as a strategic resource in urban planning. In Riga, culture is recognized by the department of strategic planning as the main tool for improving the capacity of civil society. The strategic planning department communicates with other departments during the development of urban strategy, and this is how knowledge about culture as a 'soft' tool for urban development disseminates with-in the whole municipality. Civil society organizations are recognized as mediators between municipalities and local communities, as well as holders of creativity and local knowledge. Because culture is one of the priorities in the urban development strategy, civil society organizations enter formal governance networks by being official partners in international projects, receiving local subsidies (although small amounts), and having access to formal municipal spaces, such as the NGO house.

In Oberhausen, where urban strategy formation is hindered by long-term budget debt, strategic approaches to culture are absent. Culture is not recognized as an effective tool for urban or community development within the strategic planning department. However, culture is recognized by the cultural department, who relies on actively present cultural NGOs in addressing urban shrinkage problems such as unemployment and weakening social ties, and in supporting vulnerable social groups such as refugees and unemployed residents in integration into the city or at the labor market. Their collaboration in Oberhausen is largely based on informal 'socially-binding' relations, which cannot guarantee stability. The current governance context in Oberhausen allows for limited access to decision making and power shifts. The position of cultural NGOs can be defined as "governing in the shadow of hierarchy" [77] (p. 247). This finding is in line with Bockmeyer's critical study on community nonprofit organizations in Cleveland, USA, which argues that they "will need to gain access and create a role for themselves before the processes of path dependence are established without their secure place at the decision making table in order to serve neighborhood residents and the territories they occupy" [54] (p. 47).

I highlight the heterogeneity of actors within civil society and local governments. I argue that scholars advocating for more involvement of civil society should be more precise about what type of civil society actors are meant. My findings reveal that cultural civil society organizations can take the role of mediators between inhabitants and governments. This finding is in line with another contribution to this special issue by Matoga, whose study emphasizes the importance of independent brokers between citizens and local administrations [46]. Cultural actors will not be able to consult citizens in bureaucratic procedures as seen in the paper by Matoga [46], but can utilize their strengths in innovating community engagement tools and facilitating knowledge transfer between local inhabitants and governments.

Local government is also a heterogeneous entity, where different departments often resemble different organizations with their own goals, organizational culture, and set of actors they collaborate with. Internal communication between different departments within the municipality is a governance challenge. The process of strategy-making is an opportunity to share knowledge and improve inter-departmental and external communication. However, for impoverished shrinking cities such as Oberhausen, strategy-making can be a difficult task to implement because it requires substantial financial resources. This finding echoes the paper by Hartt, who first studied 'prosperous shrinking cities,' and highlighted that even within a shrinking cities group, cities have considerably

different opportunities and policy options [72]. Thus, more research exploring strategies for non-prosperous shrinking cities is needed.

Last but not least, my study foregrounds that provision of public services and development of planning methods are disseminated among different actors outside the formal government network, and non-governmental cultural institutions have a critical role due to their knowledge of and close relations with local communities, their creativity, and access to external networks and funding. However, non-governmental cultural actors operate in precarious conditions. One of the main challenges that impedes the activities of civil society organizations in both case studies is the lack of physical spaces to perform their activities. The privatization of urban spaces appears to be a problem not only for growing cities, but also for shrinking cities. This finding contradicts the common narrative that shrinking cities are citadels of accessible and affordable spaces for artists [78]. My results show that even though empty properties are available, artists and cultural NGOs struggle to get access to affordable spaces, which hinders their sustainable operation and weakens their opportunity to contribute to urban governance. This finding is in line with studies emphasizing the weakening position of local governments in shrinking cities [54].

3.7. Conclusions

Urban strategies that utilize culture to achieve solely economic growth have been largely criticized; however, alternative cultural strategies are underexplored. Such strategies, however, are valuable to identify because they have the potential to contribute to the sustainable development of shrinking cities, as they capitalize on local resources, and center around the acute needs of local communities. This paper highlights the role of culture as a 'soft' tool for urban governance and public service provision in shrinking cities. By focusing on governance networks in the cultural field, it becomes apparent how local governments are unable to deal with governance issues alone, which increases their reliance on other actors, primarily civil society organizations. Civil society organizations possess additional personnel and financial resources, knowledge of local territories, and trustful relationships with local communities, which allows them to innovate methods for civic participation and maintain the provision of cultural and social services that municipalities are not able to ensure. The approaches differ between the 'prosperous' shrinking city of Riga and the financially struggling shrinking city of Oberhausen. The recognition of culture by the strategic department in shrinking cities is important for fostering governance networks and ensuring more stable support for cultural civil society organizations.

The research outcomes suggest several policy implications. First, strategic planners in shrinking cities should consider integrating culture into urban strategies for strengthening civil society, as well as inter-municipal and external collaborations. Second, while developing urban and cultural strategies, planners and policymakers should consider working closely with civil society stakeholders in order to develop sensitive strategies that reflect the needs and values of communities. This could include engaging local artists, cultural NGOs, and community leaders in the planning and implementation of cultural and urban strategies. Policymakers should investigate opportunities to provide stable sources of funding for cultural programs and events, affordable or free spaces for cultural and community initiatives, and they should invest in capacity building for non-governmental organizations to promote community-focused cultural development in shrinking cities.

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3.9. Appendices

Appendix A - Types of interview stakeholders

Type of Interview Stakeholders, Oberhausen	Type of Interview Stakeholders, Riga
1. Representative local leading political party	1. Representative Riga City Council–Education, Culture, and Sports Department
2. Representative Oberhausen City Council-Cultural Department	2. Representative Riga City Council–Education, Culture, and Sports Department
3. Representative Oberhausen City Council-Cultural Department	3. Representative Riga City Council–Education, Culture, and Sports Department
4. Representative Oberhausen City Council-Urban Development Department	4. Representative Riga City Council–City Development Department
5. Representatives Oberhausen City Council-Urban Development Department	5. Representative Riga City Council–City Development Department
6. Representative private urban planning organization working on a project where cultural development is planned	6. Representative Riga City Council–Property Department
7. Representative former employee of the Mayor's office working on the strategy for the Ruhr European Capital of Culture	7. Representative Riga City Council (former employee), also representative European Capital of Culture Board
8. Representative research institute working on urban cultural project	8. Representative Private Investor
9. Representative Cultural NGO [A]	9. Representative local neighborhood association [A], also a resident
10. Representative Cultural NGO [A]	10. Representative of a local neighborhood association [B], also a resident
11. Representative Cultural NGO [A]	11. Representative local neighborhood association [C], also a local activist
12. Representative Cultural NGO [B]	12. Representative Cultural NGO [A], also representative European Capital of Culture Board
13. Representative Cultural NGO [B], also a resident	13. Independent artist, who collaborates with a local NGO
14. Representative Cultural NGO [C], also an artist and a resident	14. Representative Latvian National Tourism Board
	15. Representative international cultural institute, located in Riga
	16. Representative local NGO
15. Representative Cultural NGO [D]	17. Representative local cultural NGO [A]
	18. Representative of a local cultural NGO [B]
	19. Representative of a local cultural NGO [B]
	20. Representative of a local cultural NGO [C]
	21. Representative local urban design firm

Appendix B - Strategic documents included in the analysis

	Document Title
1.	Riga Long-term Development Strategy until 2025
2.	Sustainable Development Strategy of Riga until 2030
3.	Riga Development Programme 2006–2012
4.	Riga Development Programme 2010–2013
5.	Riga Development Programme 2014–2020
6.	Riga City Cultural Strategy for 2008–2025
7.	Riga City Municipal Cultural Strategy for 2017–2030
8.	Urban Development Concept Oberhausen 2020 (STEK2020)

CHAPTER 4

Overcoming the limitations to co-production in shrinking cities: Insights from Latvia, France, and the Netherlands

Abstract

Co-production often appears as a virtue in academic research and planning practice, particularly in shrinking cities, which struggle to develop effective policies and provide sufficient level of public services. In this paper, we argue that the urban shrinkage context imposes significant limitations to co-production practices, that we urge should not be neglected. Drawing on three contrasting projects in Riga (Latvia), Nevers (France), and Heerlen (the Netherlands), we explore existing limitations and consider possibilities to overcome them. The analyses show that the efficacy of co-production practices is impaired due to a reduced level of trust towards public authorities; selective outmigration; weakened social capital; and political prioritizing of private sector interests over civil society. To overcome these, we discuss the role of several tools, namely mediating actors, independent funding, civic empowerment, and the willingness of public authorities to regenerate power relations.

4.1. Introduction

In the last twenty years, policy-makers in shrinking cities have been investigating urban strategies that are both effective and feasible, in the face of two key challenges posed by the urban shrinking context: 1) the lack of planning strategies to address shrinkage at the strategic and policy level; and 2) tightening human and financial resources to maintain infrastructure and public services [1–3]. In this regard, co-production has been proposed as a well-suited approach for shrinking municipalities. The involvement of civil society is said to provide an opportunity to deal with the manifestations of urban shrinkage and to develop innovative policies relying on local assets and capabilities, which together can lead to alternative paths of development [4–6]. Drawing on urban shrinkage scholarship that identifies specific characteristics of shrinking cities, which are likely to hinder the implementation and effectiveness of co-production initiatives, this paper diverges from a perspective that, we argue, might be overly optimistic. Specifically, we point to a tendency in co-production scholarship to assume beforehand the suitability and effectiveness of co-production in shrinking cities, and to the necessity of a more critical approach.

Against this background, we ask what are the limitations to co-production in the context of urban shrinkage, and what could be the possible avenues to overcome them? To answer this question, we draw on cases of co-production initiatives in three shrinking cities, Riga (Latvia), Nevers (France), and Heerlen (the Netherlands). All three cities have experienced long-lasting urban shrinkage, but are different in terms of the strength of civil society and tradition of civic engagement in policy and planning.

Our contribution to the co-production scholarship is two-fold. First, from an empirical standpoint, we argue that co-production as a planning and governance tool should not be idealized because of the limitations of such initiatives in the context of urban shrinkage, in particular regarding weakened social capital, diminished empowerment of disadvantaged population groups, impaired trust relation with policy-makers, and the policy-maker's tendency to prioritize private sector interests. Secondly, from a theoretical standpoint, we move away from the dominant understanding of co-production as purely co-delivery of public services, widely used in public management field. We argue for an understanding of co-production that takes into account, not simply the co-delivery of services, but also the reallocation of decision power to civil society. Drawing on our empirical findings and on previous reconceptualization of co-production focusing on the distribution of power [7,8] we suggest that only when the two conditions are met – co-production of decision-making and service provision – may co-production practices deliver alternative strategies for shrinking cities that stimulate social transformations and address shrinkage related problems.

4.2. Co-production in shrinking cities

4.2.1. Why co-producing in shrinking cities?

It has been argued that engaging citizens in co-production can benefit shrinking cities at two levels: service provision and policy-making [4]. At the level of service provision, governments in shrinking cities struggle with budget deficits because of decreasing tax revenues. Moreover, they often have difficulties attracting private investments, external public funding, and a sufficient number of qualified civil servants. In this context, the participation of civil society through co-production is considered a way to access new resources at less expense [9]. Several studies on shrinking cities share a common assumption that citizens have endogenous resources that they can use to achieve more sustainable results to counteract shrinkage, compared to government-led and top-down solutions [4,10,11].

At the level of strategy-making, local authorities often lack efficient planning tools specifically designed to address urban shrinkage. Moreover, they often lack comprehensive knowledge about local problems and available resources to develop strategic tools with local sensitivity. Historically, planning tools have been persistently designed to accommodate urban growth, which have proven to be inefficient in shrinking cities [2,12,13]. This increases the demand for the so-called alternative strategies. However, public authorities in shrinking cities often lack the capacity to experiment and innovate under the conditions of budget deficits, rising amounts of obsolete infrastructure, social problems, and bureaucratic rigidity. In this context, grassroots solutions produced through civic involvement are deemed more desirable. This is where the need for civic actors to co-produce alternative planning and governance strategies for shrinking cities becomes evident.

These two directions outline our focus on: 1) co-production of public services defined as citizen participation in public service provision; and 2) co-production of governance defined as citizen participation at the strategic level in policy and decision-making.

4.2.2. Co-production as power reallocation initiative

Many scholars in the field of urban planning use the public management approach to co-production. It is driven by the rationale for cost-efficient public service provision and often refers to co-production as a process of engaging non-traditional actors "into which any ideological content can be poured" [14] (p. 202). For example, in one of the most commonly used definitions by Bovaird, co-production is "the provision of services through regular, long-term relationships between professional service providers (in any sector) and service users or other members of the community, where all parties make substantial resource contributions" [15] (p. 847). Some scholars note that, by defining co-production through the organizational form of stakeholder involvement, research overlooks the role of politics and decisional power in configuring co-production processes [7,8,14,16]. According to them, co-production has the potential to achieve social transformation only when it aims to empower civil society and produce more inclusive and just planning models in a broader context. In this paper, we aim to take into account the power dynamics in shrinking urban context and explore whether it can improve access to planning and governance processes for groups that lack decision-making power.

Moreover, literature on co-production of urban governance criticizes top-down implementations of participatory processes, arguing that they constitute a threat to democratic accountability and can institutionalize inequalities [17]. This scholarship

underlines instead 'activities by civil-society actors both inside and outside of formalized institutions' [18] (p. 156). Actions that take place beyond legal frames and institutional settings are considered crucial for transformative change of governing practices. In this regard, participatory efforts of public authorities in shrinking cities could advance the critical state and civil societies' democratic perspectives.

In line with Albrechts [19], who highlights the processual and transformative character of co-production instead of it being a perfect ideal that can be achieved completely, we argue that co-production is an inclusive process of citizen participation, where citizens have sufficient power and resources to participate throughout both the decision-making and implementation phases. Only then is co-production able to deliver alternative strategies suitable for shrinking cities and to address social justice issues such as equity, diversity, and democracy [20]. We define co-production in shrinking cities as the engagement of civil society in policy-making and governance, through a reallocation of decisional power, to enable participation in public service provision in such a way that it benefits local residents. Benefitting local residents forms a central aspect. Here, we draw on urban shrinkage scholarship that criticizes growth-oriented strategies as not benefitting local communities and argues instead for strategies aiming to improve the quality of life.

To sum up, our focus falls on exploring the possibilities of co-production in shrinking cities, in terms of its value for delivering municipal services and tools for 'empowered participatory governance' [21]. Understood critically as a power reallocation initiative, co-production can deliver the innovative, socially just strategies, which shrinking cities are looking for. However, it is important not to idealize co-production as a planning and governance tool. Therefore, in this paper, we aim to acknowledge the limitations of co-production in order to understand how they can be overcome.

4.2.3. The limitations to co-production in shrinking cities

Sorrentino et al. [22] emphasize that co-production has been idealized among academics and policy-makers. It often appears as a magic concept, and academic discourse lacks discussion about the potential threats, challenges, and limitations to and of it. That is why we find important to analyze the limitations to the potential of co-production, because of the limits of what civil society and public authorities are capable of in the context of shrinking cities.

The first limitation to co-production in shrinking cities concerns the impaired trust of civil society in local authorities. This phenomenon has been empirically documented in the cities of Heerlen, in the Netherlands, Blaenau Gwent, in Wales, and Flint, in the USA [23–25]. The low level of trust can be explained by the lack of transparency in the governments' way of work, complicated bureaucratic procedures, and citizens feeling they have little power to affect decision-making. Besides, it is often a long-term outcome of the perceived incapacity of local policymakers to prevent events leading to shrinkage, such as company and public service closure, which politicians are held responsible for allowing happening. The low level of trust is a governance challenge, because any actions that city officials try to implement will not gain social acceptance, including co-production projects.

Second, the changing social composition in shrinking cities presents a challenge for the development of co-production practices. Shrinking cities face selective outmigration, meaning that residents who are younger or with higher education degrees tend to move out [26,27]. For this reason, the social composition in shrinking cities is often characterized by a decreasing proportion of middle-class households and an increasing proportion of low-income households [26]. Whereas the level of citizen involvement in co-production is influenced by variables such as age, socio-economic and immigrant status, and educational

level (often associated with organizational and entrepreneurial skills, and political and administrative literacy rates) [28,29]. For example, Thijssen and Van Dooren [29] showed that city neighborhoods with an "active middle-class" have more active participation, including co-production projects.

The third limitation to co-production concerns the weakened social capital in shrinking cities, understood here as "the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutional relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" [30] (p. 119). Studies show that social capital affects residents' capacity to participate in urban processes [28,29,31]. In a community with a strong level of social capital, people are more eager to engage with each other and share the resources to co-produce communal goods or services. Moreover, a community having strong social capital can lead to a spill-over effect, in which weakly connected residents benefit from living in a community with a strong network [29]. In shrinking cities, population decline results in amputated social networks and weakened social capital, as consequences of selective outmigration [25,27,32]. Weakened social capital results in a diminished ability of residents to conduct civic actions [33,34].

Last but not least, co-production in shrinking cities can be limited by the dominance of private sector in planning processes over the voices of civil society. Existing studies report on successful co-production projects where public, private, and civil society organizations are engaged, as well as citizens (e.g. in Altena, Germany [4]). However, under the stress of limited economic resources and the intense need to mobilize them, local governments in shrinking cities tend to favor private interests, while drawing the decision-making power away from civil society. As a result, little possibility for equalizing power asymmetries is allowed. Some cases show how public-private collaborations are unstable, short-term, and result in artificial co-production. This has especially been the case in post-socialist urban contexts, but also occurs in other environments [35–38]. For example, in his study on the German urban renewal program Stadtumbau Ost [Urban Development East], Bernt [39] documented the so-called "grant coalitions" between public actors and private housing corporations, which were formed to satisfy the criteria for receiving a national subsidy and split up shortly after. According to our definition of co-production, the dominance of collaboration by private actors who reproduce or intensify 'growth-oriented' urban politics does not lead either to socially just power balance or to inclusive innovative strategies for shrinking cities.

4.3. Materials and methods

4.3.1. Qualitative comparative case study

This research was conducted in a qualitative, comparative manner. It dealt with three shrinking cities in different national contexts: the French town of Nevers, the Dutch town of Heerlen, and the Latvian capital, Riga. The research was problem driven [40] and searched for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of co-production in the context of urban shrinkage. Case study research works particularly well when the goal of the researcher is to bring to the front a rich understanding of events, experiences of actors, and conclusions that can be deducted from the case. Therefore, in-depth case study research was chosen as the appropriate methodology to grasp the very nuanced and complex manifestations of the case - co-production - within the three contexts. The emphasis was put on finding out what are the limitations to co-production in the context of urban shrinkage, and what could be the possible avenues to overcome them.

4.3.2. Case study selection

Empirical studies on co-production illustrate that this phenomenon can be found in diverse contexts. However, some studies suggest that co-production is more likely to emerge and succeed in contexts with a strong civil society and long tradition of civic engagement in policy and planning [41]. Therefore, these two variables are selected for case comparison based on the "most different" research logic. We looked for case studies with maximum heterogeneity with regards to these two indicators, but high similarity in the context of long-lasting urban shrinkage. This allowed us to examine the possibilities for co-production practices to emerge in shrinking cities despite differences in tradition of civic engagement and strength of civic society.

We evaluated the 'strength of civil society' based on the rate of active citizenship[4] and participation in formal and informal volunteering activities[5]. These data are available through the survey on social participation in the European Union (EU) [42], although the most recent data is for 2015. The Netherlands had the highest level of participation in formal and informal volunteering activities among all EU member states (40.2% and 82.3%, respectively) and one of the highest active citizenship rates, with 25.2%. France had an average level on both indicators, with 23.1% and 23.2%, respectively, and a high rate of active citizenship, with 24.7%. While Latvia showed low levels of active citizenship and participation in formal volunteering activities, with only 5.6% and 7.3%, respectively, it had an average level of participation in informal activities (28.3%). Such a difference between participation in formal and informal volunteering activities can be attributed to cultural specificity; that is, Latvian society favors non-organized voluntary activities more strongly. In order to rank these countries based on the three indicators, we calculated the mean. Therefore, we assume that the Netherlands has the strongest civic society, followed by France and Latvia.

Table 1. *Values of independent variables and their means per case study. Source:* own calculations based on data from Eurostat Social Participation and Integration Statistics [42].

Country	**Latvia**	**France**	**Netherlands**
Participation in formal volunteering activities, %	7.3	23.1	40.2
Participation in informal volunteering activities, %	28.3	23.2	82.3
Active citizenship, %	5.6	24.7	25.2
Mean	13.7	23.7	49.2

Concerning the tradition of civic participation in policy and planning, Latvia has the shortest tradition, beginning from 1994 [43], while the Netherlands and France have implemented civic participation since the 1960s. The Netherlands stand out due to an event that transformed the participation culture immensely. The King's speech of 2013 announced the

[4] Active citizenship is understood as "participation in activities related to political groups, associations or parties, including attending any of their meetings or signing a petition" [42].
[5] Formal volunteering refers to "activities organized through an organization, a formal group or a club, including unpaid work for charitable or religious organizations. Informal volunteering refers to helping other people, including family members not living in the same household (e.g. cooking for others, taking care of people in hospitals/at home, taking people for a walk, shopping, etc.), helping animals (e.g. taking care of homeless, wild animals) or other informal voluntary activities such as cleaning a beach, a forest, etc." [42].

participation society and the end of the welfare state in its known form. From then on, citizens were asked to actively take responsibility for shaping their neighborhoods and fostering social wellbeing by taking over former governmental tasks. Therefore, we assume that the Netherlands has the highest level of civic participation in planning and policy, followed by France and Latvia.

Each of the three authors of this paper individually approached one of the three cases. For data collection, analyses of relevant documents, qualitative semi-structured interviews, and participant observations were the main sources. In-depth interviews were conducted in 2020 and 2021, in a semi-structured format. The participants were recruited via snowball and network sampling. In Riga, 8 interviews were included in this study. The participants included civil servants from the strategic urban planning and property development department of the city council, members of the NGO Free Riga, a private investor, and artists who were also the residents of the creative quarter. In Nevers, the research included 23 research participants with 17 users of the community center, 4 staff members and 2 external actors. With them, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted. In Heerlen, 7 interviews were conducted with the actors from the local administration, civil society, and research, as well as the intermediary actor. The researchers provided participants with the consent form with information about the project's objectives, participants' rights, as well as data use, sharing and storage, and received written (or in case of online interviews oral) consents.

The topics discussed in the interviews were similar over the three case studies. First, we were interested in exploring experiences of urban shrinkage through biographical data of individual participants or organizations, and the reasons for acting in a co-production project. Second, we studied the governance processes in implemented projects, focusing on understanding the actor networks, internal power relations, the outcomes of co-production, and the limitations to it.

4.4. Overcoming the limitations to co-production in shrinking cities

In the remainder of this paper, we present an in-depth analysis of the co-production projects in the three shrinking cities: 1) the artist-led regeneration of abandoned territories in Riga; 2) the mutual aid system to cope with social isolation in Nevers; and 3) the search for a participatory governance model to fight physical deterioration in Heerlen.

4.4.1. Artist-led regeneration of abandoned territories in Riga, Latvia

Riga was one of the largest industrial centers during the Soviet occupation of Latvia, but after the fall of the Soviet Union, the city experienced a strong outmigration wave and economic decline, followed by the abandonment of residential properties and industrial areas. From 2007–2009, Latvia was severely affected by the economic crisis, thus population numbers and the built environment degraded further. In Riga, urban shrinkage is concentrated in the urban core while the city's periphery is still growing. The Riga City Council (RCC) developed several 'carrot and stick' instruments to deal with abandoned properties, including co-financing schemes or tax penalties, but they served as weak stimuli for physical maintenance. Moreover, redevelopments that aim revive not only physical, but also the social fabric of the abandoned territories, were critically lacking.

A turning point happened during the preparations for the European Capital of Culture (ECoC), the status of which Riga received in 2014. The pressing need to find affordable spaces for performances and exhibitions of artistic projects appeared together with the

realisation of the ECoC team that there was an excessive number of vacant properties in the city. "How come that nearly every 5th building in the city centre is vacant or abandoned, but there is no space for the many cultural, arts and social initiatives?" [44] (p. 20). This frustration and paradox created the momentum for the foundation of a new artist-led temporary use movement 'Free Riga'.

The leaders of Free Riga had an idea to develop the temporary-use model for the city, which would ensure a systemic change in redevelopment of degraded spaces and give the creative community access to affordable spaces in the city centre. They started negotiations with the Property Department of RCC to turn the movement into an institution. Free Riga registered as a 'public benefit NGO' to establish closer cooperation with the municipality and be able to use municipal spaces free of charge. Moreover, regulations at that time allowed the NGOs to get a 90% tax reduction for properties in their use, which became a significant benefit for private owners to collaborate with Free Riga. Eventually, the RCC "recognise[d] Free Riga as a valuable organization in dealing with the promotion of creative and social temporary use of vacant buildings" [44] (p. 9) and signed a memorandum contract, which allowed the NGO to gain access to information on property ownership.

In 2014, Free Riga started their first project, called Tallinn's Street Quarter. The idea was to transform an abandoned courtyard with buildings of former garages into affordable spaces for artists and creative youth to work, perform, and build a community. Initially, the space belonged to the municipality, thus Free Riga asked RCC to use it free of charge. However, the municipality found private investors, who purchased the space, and advised Free Riga to continue negotiations with them. Inspired by the success of the creative quarters[6] in Moscow and Berlin and motivated by the 90% tax relief, the private owner was eager to collaborate with Free Riga to develop a commercially successful project. Later on in the interview with the representative of the property department we found that according to Latvia's privatisation policy, the city has an obligation to sell everything that is not used for its direct functions: "*that's why we're trying to get rid of everything. And the list of temporary use properties in Riga is very short; it is so bad that no one has interest in it*" (Riga, Interview 2020).

The withdrawal of the municipality in this project resulted in the situation where the NGO had little power to negotiate with the private investor over the direction of the quarter's development. More and more commercial cafes, restaurants and bars came in. The artists felt displaced: "*we became not a high priority for the kvartal [quarter in Latvian], and we feel that. It's not a cultural space anymore; it's a space that makes money*" (Riga, Interview 2020). The private owner shared in the interview that the space was not commercially successful either: the maintenance of the large derelict industrial sites requires large and regular investments, and the "*social aspects will die with the lack of electricity, water and trash collection, it all costs money*" (Riga, Interview 2020). They added: "It's like a suitcase without a handle - it's hard to carry, and it's a pity to drop it" (ibid).

Free Riga attempted to contribute to the co-production of a governance model for abandoned territories by developing an innovative temporary-use model in response to the municipal problem of physical degradation. However, it failed to durably provide power to the civil society organization, which represented artists and creative youth. Even the memorandum signed between the city council and Free Riga only granted their access to information, but did not allow any structural governance changes. From the beginning, Free Riga created little connection to the wider neighborhood community, but promoted the

[6] Creative quarter is defined as a geographical area "with groups of buildings adjusted to cultural and artistic industries in order to create a sense of identity and conditions facilitating and encouraging those activities" [48] (p. 24).

interests of a narrow interest group - artists, who were later displaced by the commercial actors. The project therefore did not succeed to deliver long-lasting social value through its attempt to co-production.

4.4.2. A mutual aid system to cope with social isolation in Nevers, France

Nevers is a mid-sized city with 33,279 inhabitants located in the center of France. Since its population peaked in the mid-1970s, the city lost 27% of its residents by 2018[7]. Historically, the city concentrated administrative and commercial functions for the surrounding rural and industrial region, which suffered several waves of industrial decline. As a result, Nevers encountered rising unemployment, residential vacancy, and poverty rates (respectively 20.3%, 17%, and 23% in 2018)[8]. Moreover, as is often the case in medium-sized French shrinking cities, Nevers faces population ageing, with a third of the municipality's residents aged over 60.

The case discussed here, called "Together we go further", was a project to establish a mutual aid system among the members of a community center, which was the project initiator. In France, community centers provide social, cultural, educational, and leisure activities, with the aim of fostering social, family, and intergenerational ties. Importantly, they help inhabitants to create and implement their own projects, by providing them with human and financial resources. The community center in Nevers is primarily financed by the national administration, which allocates family allowances (Caisse des Allocations Familiales, CAF), and partially by the local municipality. By financing community centers, national and local decision makers delegate to them not only the part of the social policy, but also the function of civic participation and community building. The aim of the founding partners is that projects led by community centers should be initiated by residents with the help and support of their staff members. Therefore, the community center is included in the co-production as a middle actor that professionally provides public services together with local volunteers.

Youth outmigration is one of the main consequences of urban shrinkage and often leads to the social isolation of elderly adults. In Nevers, however, where shrinkage is not acknowledged as a comprehensive process, this problem was not considered a political priority by the municipality, especially in comparison to other imperatives such as economic revitalization. In the context of increased isolation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the community center's staff has recognized the negative psychological consequences of forced isolation. To tackle this issue, they came up with a project that would compensate for: 1) the lack of a strong social network for individuals who are socially isolated, and 2) the lack of personal assistance for elderly and/or isolated people.

In the first phase of the project, a discussion group was organized where participants shared the challenges of the lockdown and tried to come up with coping strategies together with the center's staff members. According to the participants, sharing such experiences gave them good practical solutions to handle isolation and a good feeling of preparedness for future periods of social and mobility restrictions. However, the last discussion group session, which was dedicated to identifying coping tools and resources, became more arduous, as the participants struggled to imagine collective solutions based on their previous discussions, and to feel legitimate to suggest ideas. The lack of empowerment was later

[7] The numbers are calculated at the municipal level. At an agglomerated level, including peripheral towns, the city counts 115,351 inhabitants (INSEE perimeter Aire d'attraction des villes, AAV).
[8] At an agglomerated AAV level the percentages are respectively: 13,2%, 13,4% and 14,3%.

confirmed by the community center's director, who admitted that it was often hard to find proactive volunteers to initiate community projects.

To overcome the lack of ideas from participants, the staff members took a greater initiative in the creation of the project, resorting to a top-down approach, and proposed the solutions themselves. A project was implemented by Jeanne (the real name was changed for confidentiality reasons), one of the center's employees, who created a mutual aid board, where the participants wrote something they would offer to others and something with which they needed help. She wrote, as an inspiring example, "I offer knitting lessons" and "I am looking for someone to take care of my cat". The members had to ask Jeanne before putting anything on the board, to ensure that all services remained free. She was thus supposed to be the intermediary between the members and the board, as well as between the members themselves.

The interviews with members of the community center revealed the low level of participant involvement in the co-production of the mutual aid system and a low level of ownership. Most members found it to be a good idea but did not know how they could contribute or participate. Additionally, the participants were often already involved in similar mutual support configurations, for instance helping each other with groceries or driving to doctors' appointments. However, emotional involvement through friendship ties was a prerequisite to enable such mutual aid relationships, and, most particularly, trust was necessary for people to ask others for help. As a result, the board was hardly used after its launch. It failed to address the existing need and did not create the ideal conditions to enable mutual aid relationships. The main obstacle to its success was the failure to retain the bottom-up approach throughout the whole project and to sufficiently empower participants to create their own solution. The main positive outcome of the project was the social interactions fostered throughout its implementation phase.

4.4.3. The search for a participatory governance model to fight physical deterioration in Heerlen, the Netherlands

Heerlen is located in the southeast of the Netherlands, close to the German and Belgian borders. In the 20th century, industrialization triggered rapid economic and population growth in the city. However, the closure of the mining industry in 1965 brought economic decline and outmigration, which resulted in the long-term urban shrinkage, with unemployment, poverty, and high vacancy among the main symptoms [24]. In 2022, almost 87,000 people inhabited the city [45].

The area around the North of Heerlen - Heerlen Noord - was the most affected because it used to be the center of the mining area. With many buildings torn down, open spaces emerged and the whole area needed to be restructured. According to the Dutch legislation, area restructuring as a planning activity is a top-down responsibility. However, due to the lack of finances, the municipality realized they could not provide a new area plan to accommodate the situation. The involvement of citizens emerged as an affordable strategy to deal with the empty spaces.

The municipality developed a policy titled "Atlas Gebrookerbos", which prioritized citizen involvement in the area regeneration. This strategy profoundly changed the way of work within the municipality: new positions of account managers and an independent broker were appointed, the existing master planning method was abolished, and the formal bureaucratic procedures that obstructed residents' experimentation were refined.

Bureaucracy and long social distances within the municipality are common obstacles when it comes to civic involvement. Many citizens hesitate to realize their ideas, because they know there will be at least several people that they will be referred to, several forms they would need to fill out, and sometimes even years of preparation and collecting all necessary documents. With a good understanding of these problems, the municipality had to change its internal ways of operating. This meant not only letting go of the master planning, but profoundly changing the bureaucratic process. For the latter, the role of account managers was implemented and each civic initiative was assigned one account manager, who would guide them through the whole process. They would be the only contact point in the municipality that the citizens had to deal with, which resulted in increased accessibility to the planning process.

The role of the broker was a profound step in the process. In his interview, the broker described the role as being a "pacemaker" who helped people develop their ideas on paper, realize them on the ground, or guide them through the formal municipal procedures. The main idea of appointing the broker was to overcome skepticism and distrust of residents towards the municipality. That is why the broker had to be an independent person and not be affiliated with the municipality. The broker was employed at the independent research institute NEIMED.

In 2021, from 78 initiatives altogether, 32 have been realized or were ongoing, and 36 were not continued or were realized elsewhere. Ten of the initiatives were in the stage of idea formation. All initiatives fall under one of the three designated categories: nature, network, or urban farming. The first puts the focus on giving areas back to nature, in the form of reforesting or designing parks. Initiatives that fall under the network category typically have a goal of contributing to tourism or recreation. Such initiatives include bed and breakfasts, urban community parks, and dog schools. The third category - urban farming - puts the focus on sustainability, knowledge, and education. Examples in Gebrookerbos include urban farms or vegetable gardens, with the focus on agriculture and forestry knowledge.

When talking about Gebrookerbos, it is important to distinguish between the process and the project. Although it was set up as a project that received funding from IBA[9] and had a start and end date, Gebrookerbos was about creating a process: a new method of co-producing with citizens. At the beginning, municipal employees showed resistance as it was difficult to overcome rigid long-established methods. However, even after the project officially ended in 2020, the method of work is still ongoing. Two follow-up projects show the legacy and sustainability of Gebrookerbos. The first one, "Stadslab Heerlen", is an urban laboratory for creatives and artists who, with the help of the broker, can find vacant spaces for their initiatives. The second, "N-Power", is an international project between Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands to generate innovative neighborhood development strategies with the focus on civic empowerment and mutual knowledge exchange between public sector employees. In their interviews, the project managers shared that money has not been an issue at any point during the project: "*We started Gebrookerbos funding and there was 200,000 in it. We started in June 2018, so we have it for a while, but I think 100,000 euros now is spent and the other half not*" (Heerlen, Interview 2020).

[9] The International Building Exhibition (the Internationale Bauausstellung, IBA) is an experimental format of urban and regional development. It has its origins as a city planning instrument in Germany. Outside of Germany, IBAs have been held in Basel and Parkstad Limburg.

4.5. Discussion

In this article, we took a critical view on co-production in shrinking cities. We explored the limitations that this particular urban context imposed, and analyzed the instruments in spatial planning and urban governance that can be used to overcome these limitations to co-production.

The findings reveal that, although with different levels of success, practices where civil society was involved in governance or public service provision took place in each of the three cities, despite the varying strength of social ties and tradition of civic engagement. The three cases had different levels of motivation to pursue governance changes. Riga's case illustrated the deliberate attempt at governance change initiated by the civil society organization. Although the project did not result in significant power redistribution, it manifested an attempt of the NGO to strengthen their position to influence urban processes and improve access of affordable spaces for artists. Due to the lack of the municipality's involvement, co-production attempt resulted in a classic case of gentrification. In Nevers, the community center did not attempt to challenge the municipality's planning approach, but rather focused on finding practical solutions to dealing with social problems that were ignored by municipal officials. In Heerlen, co-production of the new governance model led to a democratization of the city's governance structure, and allocated more power to civil society. It was a deliberate process initiated by the municipality to overcome their lack of capabilities to deal with degraded territories in a shrinking city. However, the residents' input was more important for the implementation phase, rather than the decision-making. For example, residents could only work on certain spatial regeneration projects and not on other spheres. Despite these differences, in all three cases we observed several communalities, which we suggest could help to overcome the limitations to co-production in shrinking cities.

4.5.1. The role of mediating actors

The results show that co-production efforts in three cities relied on mediating actors who initiated, moderated, and/or implemented co-production projects. In Nevers, it was the community center; in Riga, the NGO Free Riga; and in Heerlen, the independent brokers. In shrinking cities, mediating actors not only help to overcome the lack of trust of civil society towards public authorities, but also help to allocate additional financial and human resources through a better knowledge of local assets and needs. Therefore, we consider the engagement of mediating actors as one of the tools to overcome the limitations of co-production in shrinking cities.

Our results are in line with Simon [46], who concluded that utilizing external professional facilitators for co-production projects contributes to their successful implementation, because mediators can devote sufficient time and effort to the project, establish common rules, as well as build confidence and mutual trust with the participants. We argue that mediating actors can 1) ensure a more neutral or 'safe' space in which residents and local authorities are encouraged to develop trust, 2) stimulate creative problem-solving, and 3) guarantee that the interests of the stakeholders are heard and considered equally [46].

However, mediating actors that are able to promote their own methodologies through strong social and human capital can interrupt community processes. This was observed in Nevers, where the top-down approach used to implement the mutual aid board resulted in a lack of ownership of the project on the part of residents. A similar issue was found in Riga, where the interests of the wider public were not considered, and mediating actors from

Free Riga defined the theme of the project and the scope for participation, as well as shaping the processes to serve their own interests in the field of arts and culture (in line with [16]).

4.5.2. The role of independent funding

Mediating actors also enable access to extra financial resources, which is very important for shrinking cities with declining budgets, and which are needed to experiment, innovate, and stimulate social change. The case of Nevers shows that financial support from the central government allowed the community center sufficient independence to address an acute problem that was overlooked by local authorities. Therefore, external funding can be considered an instrument to reduce dependency on local government's agenda.

4.5.3. The role of civic empowerment and leadership in co-production projects

The three cases confirm the important role of leadership and civic empowerment for initiation and implementation of co-production projects in shrinking cities. In Heerlen and Riga, the initiators of co-production projects were in possession of strong social capital and leadership skills. The case of Nevers shows that when a co-production project was introduced in a community with a large proportion of disadvantaged people, the project lacked civic empowerment and strong leadership from beneficiaries themselves. As professional community workers compensated for this lack by taking on leadership, the project ultimately turned into a top-down approach. We conclude that empowering community groups is a prerequisite to successful co-production initiatives. Our findings are in line with Turnhout et al. [16], who argued that the empowerment of marginal actors is generally "a fundamental goal of co-production projects" (p. 17). Re-negotiating roles, powers, and redirecting priorities to cater to the community, is necessary to empower more vulnerable groups and involve them in decision-making. For further research, it would be beneficial to explore methods of community empowerment in shrinking cities.

4.5.4. The willingness of public authorities to reconsider power relations

The case in Heerlen shows that the acceptance of urban shrinkage by the municipality, as well as their ability to step back from the position of power and innovate, became central for the sustainability of co-production project. The case in Riga, meanwhile, illustrates how the collaboration between the private investor and the local NGO, with passive involvement of the local authorities resulted in gentrification and restricted the sustainable delivering of social value to the neighborhood through co-production. The social relevance of this finding is quite significant, as the situation in which local governments favor private sector interests over community interests is not uncommon in post-socialist shrinking cities [35–37,47].

Based on these results, we suggest that the willingness of a municipality to stimulate social transformations and to take the role of 'enabler' of citizen experimentation can be a prerequisite to overcome the limitations to co-production. The shrinking context can be considered a stimulus for the municipality to experiment and open planning processes to civic society. Improving residents' access to information about public participation and adopting residents' ideas into funding schemes are tools that can help enabling successful co-participation. In this regard, further research could explore forms and processes of experimental governance in shrinking cities.

4.6. Conclusion

First, hoping to make an empirical contribution to the co-production field, we identified in the literature four limitations to co-production in diverse contexts of urban shrinkage, and tested them empirically. The first limitation – the lack of trust in public authorities – was the main challenge for Heerlen municipality and the trigger to involve local residents in co-production of the new governance model. The second and third limitations – diminished capacity for civic participation driven by the particular social composition and weakened social capital – were observed in Nevers, where the lack of civic empowerment among a specific group of disadvantaged residents impeded the co-production project initiated by the community center. On the contrary, initiators of the Riga project represented the empowered group with a strong social capital - creative youth and artists, who were capable of initiating an urban project, and entering into negotiations with private and public actors. This fact can be associated with Riga's capital status, which is likely to affect the social composition with more young, educated and middle-class residents remaining in the city. In Heerlen, selective outmigration is not hindering co-production efforts, as the elderly comprise the main group of involved civil society actors in the Gebrookerbos project. Most of those actors have been living in Heerlen for a long time and place-attachment plays a crucial role for the tacit knowledge about the neighborhoods. The last limitation - the dominance of the private sector in planning processes over civil society - was vividly observed in Riga, while such a constraint did not appear in the other two cases.

Second, we derived several instruments to overcome limitations to co-production. All three case studies showed the importance of engaging mediating actors in co-production processes to overcome the impaired trust of civil society towards public authorities and to allocate additional financial and human resources. Besides, the use of external funding in Nevers, allocated from sources other than local municipality, ensured independence from local government agendas and allow the project to focus on residents' needs. Leadership and civic empowerment provided a strong base for the development of co-production practices in Riga and Heerlen. Finally, the willingness of public authorities to regenerate power relations was crucial for innovative co-production of local governance in Heerlen.

The second contribution of our paper addresses the definition of co-production. We took a critical stance on the commonly used public management definition, which pursues cost-efficiency as an ultimate goal. Drawing on Watson and Mitlin [7,8], we adopted an approach to co-production focusing on the power dynamics in urban governance. We defined co-production in shrinking cities as the engagement of civil society in policymaking and governance, through a reallocation of decisional power, to enable participation in public service provision in such a way that benefits local residents. Empirically, the identified limitations to co-production in the contexts of shrinkage and possibilities to overcome them confirm the centrality and relevance of power reallocation processes in the success of co-production practices.

The main limitation of this study lies in the fact that the most different case study research design considers three radically different urban contexts and approaches to co-production, in terms of method, scale and goal. While this fruitfully acknowledges the empirical diversity of co-production attempts, it also limits the possibilities to effectuate a systematic comparison, in particular between similar attempts at co-production in different contexts, or conversely different approaches to co-production in a similar context, two avenues which could be logical progressions for this work.

On the other hand, the most-different case study design allows us to observe how the four limitations and four ways to overcome them were not consistently observed in all three

cities, and to draw attention to the importance of local context. Shrinking cities scholars repeatedly cautioned urban practitioners and public authorities against universal planning solutions for shrinking cities [1,2,3,8]. Our findings confirm that place-based instruments that consider available resources and needs of the local population should be tailored to each particular context.

Another limitation of our research design is that we cannot claim to be certain that what we observed in shrinking cities could not take place in the context of urban growth, having not conducted the comparative research with growing cities. However, we argue that in our case studies, the co-production projects were motivated by the particular needs resulted from urban shrinkage and thus are likely to be specifically relevant to this particular context. On the other hand, looking at the shrinking contexts enables to better understand the constraints and possibilities for co-production practices in the contexts of limited resources (economic, demographic, etc.). These insights could prove useful to understand limitations to co-production practices in growing areas, where actors are also often confronted to limited resources, for instance, in the context of austerity.

4.7. References

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CHAPTER 5

Discussion and conclusion

In this thesis, I investigate the culture's role in the governance of shrinking cities. My aim was to demonstrate the new value of culture for shrinking cities—showing how it can be more than a just a tool for economic and physical regeneration, but rather a catalyst for a structurally new governance approach that is more inclusive, democratic, and self-reliant. I argue that culture acts as a glue for building relationships and connecting actors within collaborative networks, both within local governments as well as with external actors. It is especially valuable especially valuable for engaging civil society and vulnerable residents. Those built relationships and expanded networks that culture mediates, I argue, lead to governance innovations that shrinking cities are increasingly investigating (Haase et al., 2012).

In this final chapter, I present my discussions and conclusions about the role of culture in the governance of shrinking cities. I address the three foundational questions to understand the phenomenon of governance through culture. I first discuss (1) who governs culture in shrinking cities and who governs culture beyond governing agencies or institutions? After that, I reflect on the "how" question: (2) how is culture governed (including whose culture is governed)? Finally, I address the question: (3) what is governed through culture in shrinking cities? But before tackling these questions, I revisit the fundamental inquiry concerning the nature of culture. I consolidate insights from interviews with different actors in Riga and Oberhausen to answer the essential question: what is culture?

5.1. Revisiting culture: definition and typology

Despite the fact that the definition of a 'shrinking city' varies between different epistemic communities, and depending on the geographical contexts where it manifests, it was possible to arrive at a unified definition of 'shrinking city' that is widely accepted by urban planning and governance scholars. However, defining 'culture'—a concept preset in nearly all disciplines and encompassing both material and non-material elements—required a more extended and nuanced exploration. In the field of planning, two predominant definitions of culture emerge. The first is prevalent in traditional physical planning, where culture is seen as a material object manifested through design, architecture, or public arts.

With the collaborative turn in planning, the anthropological definition of culture 'as a way of life' has gained more traction, although the materialist approach to culture still predominates within the discipline. This materialist focus has largely been shaped by neoliberal planning, understood as "a restructuring of the relationship between private capital owners and the state, which rationalizes and promotes a growth-oriented approach to urban development" (Baeten, 2017, p. 1). I adopt a critical perspective on pro-growth neoliberal planning strategies, where culture is considered primarily as a resource to generate profits. My aim is to look beyond this narrow view of culture in urban planning and governance, exploring what additional value culture can offer to the residents of shrinking cities.

Through numerous interviews, which have brought me closer to understanding urban culture in two shrinking cities, Riga and Oberhausen, I have identified three distinct types of culture: 1) institutional culture, 2) folklore or traditional culture, and 3) participatory culture. These types differ across several characteristics, which are presented in Table 1, including the types of actors who engage with them, sources of funding, target groups, and

the functions they perform. I further elaborate on these three types of culture and their characteristics in the text following the table.

Table 1. *Three types of culture in shrinking cities. Source:* Author

	Institutional culture	**Folklore culture**	**Participatory culture**
Main governing actors	• Cultural departments of municipal, regional, and national governments • Public cultural institutions	• Cultural department of municipal, national governments	• Third-sector organizations • Neighborhood communities • Independent actors (e.g., artists) • Local governments (e.g., the strategic department of Riga City Council)
Funding	• Governmental cultural budgets (regular, stable, guaranteed) • Private investors	• Governmental cultural budget (regular, stable, guaranteed)	• Low-scale governmental subsidies • External grants allocated by the third-sector cultural organizations (national, supra-national grants) (non-regular, non-stable, not guaranteed)
Exclusion based on	• Entrance fee • Social conventions (dress norms, etiquette norms, expected behavior) • Level of education	• Knowledge of local language • Belonging to an ethnic group	• None or sometimes a geographical location within the city (in some cases, activities are carried out at the neighborhood level)
Key functions in urban governance	• Urban attractiveness • Economic profit • Civic pride • Civic education	• National pride • Belonging to a community/group • Organized leisure time	• Community building • Civic engagement in urban life • Civic empowerment • Building relations between local governments and civil society • Innovating new methods of community engagement • Gaining local knowledge/data • Allocating local resources

1) **The institutional type of culture** was evident in both Riga and Oberhausen. This form of culture encompasses arts, heritage, and education, playing a crucial role in the dissemination and preservation of cultural practices and knowledge. Typically, this type of culture is established by various levels of governments, governmental organizations, or private entities to serve the specific cultural purposes. Examples of such institutions include national museums, galleries, theaters, and city art schools for children. These

institutions primarily target international and regional tourists, as well as residents. My findings indicate that institutional culture receives the most substantial funding from state and municipal budgets, significantly contributing to the local employment. For instance, the case of Oberhausen illustrates this:

> *The the biggest cultural institute - it's the theatre. It gets 9 million euro, something about that. From the town, and different money for projects and other work from the land of North-Rhein Westphalia - federal government. And they get also money from the people who go to the theater visiting. I think they have something about 11 million every year. And we give them 9 million, as the town's biggest cultural institute. There are working 125 people in that theatre.* (Interview, Oberhausen, 2021).

According to the data collected in Riga and Oberhausen, formal cultural institutions do not typically engage with broader communities or urban development. Their primary objective is to offer high-level cultural services to visitors, whom they view as cultural consumers. These institutions are professional, formal organizations with specific missions and regulations.

The level of inclusion within institutional culture is limited offering restricted accessibility to community groups, especially vulnerable or marginalized ones. It is directed towards individuals with a certain level of education, familiarity with social conventional norms, understanding of artistic language, and ability to afford entrance fees. For example, during the European Capital of Culture event in Riga, the curators aimed to increase cultural participation and make the cultural program accessible to a broader community, particularly those who do not usually engage as cultural consumers. The curatorial team decided to prioritize community cultural initiatives and adopted a communication language that appealed to the wider population. However, this approach created tensions with professional artists, who typically target their work towards well-educated art consumers:

> *…we had big fight with artists, because they approached our communication team and said, what you wrote in there, this is not about my installation, my installation is la-la-la, different words that are not possible to understand, even for us, not [for] regular people on the streets. And we somehow as translators of all these artistical concepts, and artistical parties, [with a] little bit simpler language, of course not to lower the level, but to increase understanding.* (Interview, Riga, 2019)

2) **The traditional or folklore type of culture** was prominent in Riga but was not observed in Oberhausen. In Latvia, folklore culture is practiced through amateur art groups, such as choirs, instrumental ensembles, and choreography groups. These groups are typically led by the amateur group leaders – cultural professionals with higher education degrees, who are formally employed and receive their salaries from the local cultural budget. Participants in these amateur art groups are not required to have any specific level of education or pay participation fees, making this type of culture generally more inclusive than institutional culture. However, in Riga, folklore culture is predominantly practiced by individuals of Latvian ethnicity, who speak Latvian language and are familiar with traditional songs and dances. As a result, ethnic minorities, expats, and refugees are often excluded from these traditional cultural activities. A quote from a representative of Riga's local government supports this observation:

> *You know there is singing tradition, and in Latvia we have the Song and Dance Festival and so on... It's a great feeling to sing and to participate in this big concert. But there are some nationalistic things. […] The problem is that for singing and dancing tradition those are mainly*

Latvians, and I really enjoy those from my heart, I go there, and it's better than yoga for me. But there is this thing that Russians usually don't go to choirs, but like half of the population are Russians, so... You know... I believe that culture needs to be transformed. But it's hard question. (Interview, Riga, 2021).

For urban governance, traditional culture can serve as a tool to enhance the sense of pride and belonging, as well as to strengthen national or local identity. It also plays a role in bringing people together and fostering social capital. Additionally, in an interview with a representatives of Riga's cultural department, it was shared that folklore amateur culture is seen as a way to manage residents' leisure time. This quote elaborates on this idea:

… and you can look at it [participation in the traditional amateur activities] from the point of view of a city and inhabitants. This is how they spend their time, in a creative way, very organized. […] It's about city cultural budget. Becasue those conductors and all amateur group leaders, they are professionals, they are all really academically graduated people, and they get salarly for that. And this is big difference, this is how in Riga, part of people are manged to be in cultural life, because if they are active there, they also are active as part of cultural products' consumers. (Interview, Riga, 2019)

3) **The third type—the participatory culture—**emerged as the most engaged form of culture in urban development. It was recognized as such by urban planners, strategic planners, cultural NGOs, residents, and cultural departments. Unlike other forms of culture, participatory culture does not focus on the production of artistic objects or physical change, but on the social processes of artistic creation that influence relationships between people.

It took me some time to understand why this type of culture became so fundamental in my research. The reason is its inclusivity: participatory culture is accessible to everyone familiar with the local area. It does not require specific education, skills, or knowledge; the activities are free of charge and typically take place in community or public spaces. Additionally, for shrinking cities' governments, participatory cultural activities are low-cost and therefore low-risk. The primary aims of these activities are to address social issues, repurpose local resources, and empower local communities. Participatory culture or arts are also known by other names, such as social engaged art, community-based art, dialogical art, and collaborative art (Bishop, 2012; Carey & Sutton, 2004; Lavrinec, 2014).

However, participatory cultural strategies are not without criticism. First, like other participatory practices in urban planning, they often benefit only the groups that actively participate, which may not fully represent the vulnerable social groups most affected by shrinkage. Second, while these alternative culture-led models may address "softer" aspects of community development, such as improving collective identity and civic pride, they may insufficiently address the economic and "hardware" aspects of regeneration, such as employment or the provision of cultural facilities (Binns, 2005). Nevertheless, if such strategies are combined with economically oriented and infrastructure-driven projects, they could contribute to a more integrated regeneration approach. Thirds, participatory cultural strategies often rely heavily on individuals, making them somewhat fragile. Finally, these strategies have been criticized for shifting the responsibility of governments onto citizens and non-governmental actors. Clair Bishop has argued that participatory culture may lead to "political quietism" (in Bell, 2015), meaning that these strategies are low-budget alternatives that support the status

quo rather than challenge and oppose mainstream regimes. Governments might be "quieting" the current state of affairs by staging cultural engagement, which ultimately does little to address social problems and inequality. However, it is important to note that this critique has existed since the advent of cultural strategies. This concept is often referred to as the "carnival mask"—the ability of culture to conceal social polarization and deprivation in the eyes of the population (Harvey, 1989 in García, 2004).

Through the interviews, I have explored the varying relationships my informants have with participatory culture. They attribute several qualities to it. The first quality aligns with a broad anthropological understanding of culture as a "way of life". Participants describe participatory culture as deeply embedded in and essential to the urban environment. The following interview quotes reveal this quality:

- *'Culture is not a luxury but a daily necessity.'*
- *It is 'not a festive dress but a daily life.'*
- *'It [culture] is in the air.'*
- *'Culture is not just like the theatre or concert hall or the events four times a year, like festivals. But [it is] also local way of how we're doing.'*
- *'It's the way how people live in the area, it's hard to define it but at the same time it's easy, it's like the local identity, it's already there. What people think, what people find important (they live there for one, two, three generations) and what their specific traditions, places, rituals, meeting places and so on [are]…. I would say that the local urban culture is not necessarily culture as service or product, but how people are living there.'*

The second quality pertains to the productive and change-making nature of participatory culture. The following quotes illustrate this aspect:

- *'[Culture is a] positive force to change everything.'*
- *'Culture is kind of this invisible bacteria or virus, can intervene and change.'*
- *'…and then you're probably not anymore big and bright, and endlessly growing, and looking for success. [You are] being shrinking, old, small, and probably not so flexible anymore. And then culture is a major tool to make your life pleasurable and give you inspiration and motivation'.*

Besides, the informants describe participatory culture as a dynamic, non-linear *process* that evolves alongside society and is deeply embedded in the urban environment:

- *'Cultural approach is alive, it's not so easy to put it in a box.'*
- *'Culture is that you're buying products in local market, not in Maxima or Rimi [Latvian supermarket chains], because it is interaction between people, and the activity sometimes is rare, this is urban culture.'*
- *'You can't find this border between where is culture, where is urbanism, and this is why this is very important for city development and regeneration of the city. … Especially in contemporary arts, this difference, where culture starts and ends and [where] urbanism and development, sometimes it's not easy to find.'*

With these qualities, culture performs as a 'glue' that stimulates effective governance in shrinking cities. The case of Riga, explored in Chapter 2, illustrates how neighborhood cultural initiatives during the European Capital of Culture engaged residents in urban processes and strengthened relationships between individual residents and local neighborhood initiatives, which represented neighborhood interests within the local

administration. Some of these initiatives evolved into formal neighborhood organizations, that address environmental, social, and political issues. Participatory activities also serve as action-oriented culture, with the greatest potential among the three types to drive change. They are accessible to a broader audience, challenge the status quo, spark critical discussions, and imagine or practice alternative ways of living. In conclusion, the value of such culture for shrinking cities lies in its ability to build connections between individuals, fostering communities, and between governing actors, integrating them into collaborative networks for innovative and effective governance.

5.2. Who governs culture in shrinking cities?

Traditionally, the main actors governing shrinking cities through culture are governments (my research is primarily focused on local governments), third-sector organizations (including non-governmental organizations, civic initiatives, and community groups), and in occasional cases, private actors. These three groups adhere to different types of culture and target their activities towards various resident demographics. Let us examine how culture-led governance contellations unfold in the two cities under study.

Oberhausen, a shrinking post-inditrial town, faces numerious social issues, including financial defficits and a lack of professional educational insitutions. The city has a significant proportion of long-term unemployed people, elderly people, vulnerable youth, migrants, and refugees. While the local administration recognizes the urgent need to engage with and assist these groups and assist them, it lacks the resources and capabilities to develop efficient methods for addressing the social challenges they face.

Due to Oberhausen's significant financial deficit for cultural affairs, the local government prioritizes cultural services of regional and international importance, or those that intersect with other policy areas, such as education. The Cultural Department of Oberhausen City Council is directly responsible for supporting cultural institutions, including the town museum, the Ludwig gallery, a theater, and a library. Additionally, the city supports the annual International Short Film Festival, an event of regional significance. Moreover, Oberhausen backs educational cultural institutions such as the Volkshochschule (a community college), the music school for children and young adults, and the Archive and Memorial Center, which serves as a reminder of the era of fascism and national socialism. These institutions primarily target children and youth, international and regional visitors, and the local population. However, these cultural functions, which are the classical responsibilities of any city, do not necessarily address the specific needs of the vulenrable social groups present in Oberhausen.

Advantageously, due to the promotion of the sociocultural policy in Germany, the city has a long tradition of sociocultural centers. The German Confederation of Sociocultural Centers states that the aim of such institutions is to bring "cultural to all", regardless of age or nationality. They serve all forms of aesthetic expression, not just art, and they support civic participation and the democratic involvement of a wide population (Reinwand-Weiss, 2021). Interestingly, Oberhausen is the city with one of the highest numbers of sociocultural centers in the Ruhr region. The oldest center in Western Germany, called K14, opened in 1969 and is still active today in Oberhausen. Sociocultural centers are partially funded by the municipality, and they also benefit from external funding from the land, state, or the European Union. They are actively involved in organizing projects with different target

groups, such as unemployed, or elderly residents. These centers have established relationships with vulnerable groups, possess effective ways to work with them, and have skills in attracting resources for such work. The municipality has recognized the important role of sociocultural centers in serving vulnerable groups and ensures support where possible (read more in chapter 3).

My findings reveal that private actors actors are absent from the cultural domain in Oberhausen. For example, a representative of the Cultural Depatment of the City of Oberhausen says, *"But it's [collaborating with private actors in cultural sector] not so easy like in towns with a big economy, and with many people with much money. This is in Oberhausen not so easy, because they are not so many [private cultural actors]."* (Interview, Oberhasuen, 2021).

In Riga, cultural affairs are managed by the Cultural Division of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports. Similar to Oberhausen, the municipal cultural budget is used to support cultural institutions such as cultural centers, museums, a concert venue, and an exhibition hall. In addition, the department is responsible for organising events (such as the Christmas market in winter) and supporting amateur tranditional arts, such as choires, traditional music, dance, and song groups. Interestingly, until 2009, Riga City Council had a separate Cultural Department, but in 2009, it was merged together with other departments into the Department of Education, Culture and Sports. This merger had negative consequences for culture, as education and sport affairs became higher priorities compared to culture.

Furthermore, the city lacks physical spaces for cultural acitivites, especially for cultural centers and music concerts. In Riga, all the municipal spaces are owned by the Department of Property and then leased out to other departments. When a property becomes available, the Department of Property allocates spaces to other departments based on a waiting list. The waiting time to get a space for the cultural department is long. "*Kindergardens, schools and social centers are prioritized, so we [cultural division] dutifully wait. […] Sometimes we get part of the buildings when schools close, but we are not always in the forefront. And a school is a school, it is not always possible to use it as a cultural center. (Translated from Russian by the author)."* (Inteview, Riga, 2020). This situation once again proves that cultural policy is less prioritized compared to other policies.

With the cultural activities presented above, the local government of Riga targets local residents and domestic or international tourists who attend cultural events; smaller neighbourhood communities who attend neighbourhood cultural centers; as well as the local residents who belong to Latvian culture, primarily Latvians. The Cultural Division also holds funding tenders, where individual residents, community groups, or cultural NGOs can apply for funding for their activities.

Apart from the Cultural Division, culture in Riga is also actively governed by the Department of Urban Development. Urban planners engage with participatory culture that is accessible to diverse groups of residents and does not require education, talent, or special skill. Participatory culture is used to engage local residents in the *process* of working together to organize acitivities in the neigbourhoods—the areas where they live, understand, and connect to. Besides, participatory culture is used to develop relationships with cultural NGOs and artists, who possess creativity, knowledge, and the trust of local communities

and are able to experiment with different methods of community engagement in order to find the efficient and innovative ways to work with communities.

In Riga, compared to Oberhausen, private actors are more actively engaged in the cultural sector, especially in developing creative quarters. One case of such developed is presented in Chapter 4. In this chapter, we reviewed the constellation of actors who govern culture based on the data collected in Riga and Oberhausen. Another interesting question that follows is how this constellation of governing actors came into being. I relfect on this question in the next section.

5.3. How are shrinking cities governed though culture?

An interesting similarity between the two cities, despite their different contexts, is that cultural actors who engage in urban and social development actively utilize participatory culture—a culture that works across sectors, mainly cultural and social. In Germany, this type of culture is better known as socioculture. While in Germany, the concept of socioculture has a long tradition at the national level, in Riga, this understanding of culture is just starting to take shape and application.

However, there are significant differences between Riga and Oberhausen in how the cities and social services are governed with participatory culture. The first difference concerns **the role of urban planning departments** in recognizing, promoting, and utilizing the value of participatory culture in urban development. In Riga, the engagement of Urban Development Department in the ECoC process, and its collaboration with the Cultural Department, helped strategic planners recognize culture as an important tool for neighborhood development: to strengthen local identity, develop communities, and engage residents in urban life (see more in Chapter 2). The urban planners assign participatory culture a transformative role in the rise of civil society and the formation of neighborhood associations. These associations have became important partners for urban development because they represent residents, hold knowledge about local problems and resources, and disseminate information between the governments and residents. The strategic planners develop the capacities of these local neighborhood associations by inviting them to international workshops and conferences.

In 2019, the Urban Development Department has become the leader of an EU-funded cultural project—the 'UrbCultural Planning' project. During this project, strategic planners collaborated with independent artists and cultural NGOs to develop creative solutions for urban challenges such as weakened social ties, housing vacancies, and the emptiness of large industrial zones. Strategic planners were engaged in a network with international experts in cultural development and gained a lot of knowledge on how to foster local cultural activities. They prioritized empowering artists and NGOs and developing their capacities instead of focusing solely on delivering results. Besides, planners gave freedom to artists and cultural NGOs to experiment and develop their own methods of working with communities. This unconventional attitude of the strategic department enhanced trust in them from artists, NGOs, and local community organizations. During the process of developing a new urban strategy in Riga, the strategic planners encouraged the dissemination of knowledge about the value and functions of culture in urban and community development further to other departments of the City Council.

In Oberhausen, the German tradition of socioculture serves as fertile ground for integrating culture in social and community aspects. However, the official strategy of Oberhausen does not make use of this. At the Urban Planning Department, collaboration with the Cultural Department is lacking:

> "*The culture bureau is part of the planners' group, but it's more like informal, when we meet every month, so that everyone can tell latest developments or if they have questions to the groups, and I think culture bureau is part of the group, I am not sure. But we don't have direct contact, we're not working on projects together with cultural department*". (Interview, Oberhausen, 2021).

To conclude, the role of the strategic department in recognizing contemporary culture for urban and social development in cities proves to be crucial for having an integrated cross-sectoral plan, where culture is used as a tool for improving social justice and inclusion, increasing the capacities of local NGOs, and fostering civic engagement in decision-making. Furthermore, participatory culture is also used to strengthen the identity of local neighborhoods, which facilitates a sense of belonging, social capital, and place attachment.

The second interesting phenomenon in the governing process is **the adaptive strategies of cultural NGOs and local governments** to provide mutual help to each other in running participatory cultural activities in situation of scare resources (presented in Chapter 3). As stated in Chapter 3, artists and cultural NGOs are the main actors who govern cities through participatory culture and who work on the ground with local communities. It is an interesting process how artists and NGOs negotiate their collaborative strategies to allocate the necessary resources and capabilities to perform their functions. First, artists and activists must unite into formal organizations such as neighborhood associations or NGOs. The formal status allows them to become official partners of local governments and to receive state and municipal grants. Beneficially, NGO status often allows access to spaces with reduced taxation (as in the case of Riga described in Chapter 4). Furthermore, to qualify for EU grants, cultural NGOs often have to partner with local governments.

The cultural departments of local governments do not have sufficient resources to support participatory culture and the actors who utilizes it; however, they do recognize its importance for cities. That is why the local governments try to either formalize stable fundings or find informal ways to assist sociocultural NGOs. In Riga, for example, the cultural department developed a special funding competition to secure regular funding for NGOs. In Oberhausen, several low-scale funding schemes are also made available. However, predominantly, participatory cultural actors are supported there via informal strategies. For example, the Cultural Department of Oberhausen City Council sets an agreement with a property owner to use a space or assists in finding additional funding. Such negotiation strategies are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

5.4. What is governed through culture in shrinking cities?

My fieldwork in the two cities reveals a variety of phenomena that are governed through culture in shrinking cities, which are summarized in Table 2 and elaborated in the text below.

***Table 2**. The role of participatory culture in urban governance of shrinking cities. Source:* Author

I. Stimulating social cohesion		
Participatory cultural activities bring diverse people together to participate in a collective activity, develops social ties (social capital), and foster social cohesion.	Participatory cultural activities engage people in learning about and reflecting on history, identity, and heritage, giving them knowledge about their environment and community. This, in turn, strengthens urban identity, place/community attachment, and civic pride.	
II. Strengthening civil society		
Participatory cultural activities contribute to the rise of active citizenship and the formation of organized neighborhood initiatives that engage in urban, political, and social life.	Participatory cultural activities contribute to the development of capacities of third-sector organizations that work with diverse urban communities, including vulnerable ones (e.g., methods to work with communities).	Participatory cultural activities provide opportunities for social inclusion for groups that are hard to reach for local governments (e.g., vulnerable and marginalized populations).
III. Building collaborative networks with actors who possess capabilities that are generally lacking in public administration (creativity, flexibility, critical thinking, and trust with local communities)		
Participatory cultural actors (e.g., artists and third-sector organizations) attract additional resources (labor, financial, time, etc.) for community and urban regeneration projects.	Through participatory cultural actors, local governments enter into dialog with communities and gain knowledge about their local needs, problems, and resources. This is particularly valuable in case of low resident trust in local governments.	
IV. Developing new methods for community and urban development		
Artists and third-sectors cultural organizations have the capacity and resources to experiment, establish long-term, trustful relationships with communities, and develop new methods of community engagement and urban development.	By utilizing creative artistic methods, such as cultural mapping and visioning, local governments are able to collect relevant data about existing problems and available resources in order to develop efficient, locally-based solutions.	
V. Providing public sociocultural services		
Participatory cultural actors ensure the provision of accessible cultural services for diverse population groups, for which local governments have few resources.	Participatory cultural actors tackle socio-economic problems of vulnerable social groups (e.g., workshops and certified educational courses for refugees).	
VI. Strengthening interdepartmental communication within local administration		
Participatory culture is used to engage different departments in collaboration on cultural projects (e.g., urban development, cultural, and property departments), and as a result, it stimulates communication between them.	Participatory culture allows for the exchange of knowledge and the expansion of partnership networks between different departments.	Participatory culture can foster an integrated strategic planning process.

I. Participatory culture emerges as a catalyst for stimulating social cohesion within cities, enabling diverse populations to engage in collective activities and fostering a profound understanding of cultural history and heritage.

Firstly, participatory culture serves as a unifying force that brings diverse individuals together to participate in shared activities, fostering the development of social ties and social cohesion. As residents engage in collaborative endeavors, they form meaningful connections with one another, creating networks of support and mutual trust. These social ties, also known as social capital, contribute to a sense of community and solidarity within shrinking cities. The collective involvement in participatory culture

nurtures a sense of interconnectedness, bridging societal divides, and promoting mutual understanding and respect among residents from various cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Secondly, artistic community methods widely used by artists, such as cultural mapping, or visioning, actively engage individuals in learning and reflecting on their community's cultural history, identity, and heritage. The acquisition of this cultural knowledge contributes to the strengthening of urban identity and fosters a profound sense of place/community attachment and pride. Residents become more invested in the well-being of their city, viewing it as a unique and cherished space that reflects their collective identity and heritage. This heightened sense of belonging and attachment nurtures a shared sense of responsibility for the urban environment, reinforcing residents' willingness to remain in shrinking cities.

II. Besides, through participatory cultural activities, local governments are able to strenthen the capacities of civil society to engage in decision-making processes and stimulate citizen engagement in urban life.

Firstly, participatory culture serves as a catalyst for empowering active citizenship. Through cultural engagement, residents develop a stronger sense of ownership and agency over their places of residence, and are motivated to participate in urban and political life. This newfound empowerment fosters grassroots efforts in forming organized groups and community associations that actively engage in local affairs, ranging from neighborhood revitalization projects to advocating for policy changes. The collective participation of citizens strengthens the social fabric of shrinking cities and nurtures a sense of communal responsibility, leading to the emergence of a robust civil society that actively collaborates in addressing the shared challenges.

Secondly, participatory culture creates opportunities for local governments to enhance the capacities of NGO actors who work closely with diverse urban communities, including vulnerable groups. By incorporating participatory methods and practices, local governments can collaborate with valuable actors such as NGOs, who have capacities and resources to develop tailored approaches to community engagement. Through cultural initiatives, such as art projects, heritage preservation, and community-driven events, NGOs can effectively interact with residents, understanding their unique needs and concerns. This participatory collaboration not only fosters trust between NGOs and communities but also empowers NGOs to act as intermediaries, amplifying the voices of marginalized and vulnerable groups within the policymaking process.

Third, by engaging with cultural NGOs and local artists, participatory cultural activities play a pivotal role in promoting social inclusion for groups that are hard to reach for local governments, such as vulnerable and marginalized populations. By incorporating participatory approaches in cultural initiatives, community-driven projects become more accessible and relevant to these underrepresented groups. The inclusivity of participatory culture fosters an environment where diverse voices are heard and valued, leading to increased representation and a more equitable distribution of sociocultural services within shrinking cities.

III. Effective governance in urban environments necessitates the involvement of diverse actors beyond traditional institutions, fostering collaboration and collective problem-solving. Participatory culture emerges as a catalyst in stimulating collaborative networks

with non-traditional actors, such as individual artists and third-sector organizations, who possess valuable qualities such as creativity, flexibility, critical thinking, and trust with local communities.

Firstly, participatory culture plays a pivotal role in nurturing ongoing dialogue and learning with communities through artists and cultural NGOs. The collaborative nature of participatory approaches encourages dialogues with communities, thourgh which cultural actros develop an understanding of community dynamics, including local communities' needs, concerns, and aspirations. Thus, the involvement of artists and cultural NGOs in the local governments' networks enhances the legitimacy of governance efforts, thereby promoting trust and collaboration between non-traditional actors and formal institutions.

Secondly, participatory culture proves instrumental in attracting additional resources for urban projects through the involvement of individual artists and third-sector organizations. Participatory approaches promote the inclusion of creative, flexible, and critical-thinking actors who offer innovative solutions and fresh perspectives on urban challenges. Individual artists and third-sector organizations bring their skill sets and often mobilize human resources, financial support, and volunteer efforts to advance collaborative governance initiatives. The synergy between the participatory cultural actors and local governments result in more resource-rich urban projects.

IV. In the pursuit of fostering community and urban development, local authorities in shrinking cities are increasingly turning to cultural actors and cutural NGOs who have relevant capacities to develop innovative methods for community urban development. These crucial capacities are creativity, flexibility, and trust with local communities. Through engaging with participatory cultural actors, local authorities stimulate innovative community-driven approaches to urban planning.

As mentioned earlier (and describe in Chapter 3), the inclusion of artists and third-sector actors infuses creativity, flexibility, and new expertise into urban initiatives, allowing for experimentation with alternative approaches. As a result, new methods of community engagement and urban development emerge, which are generally more inclusive and reflective of community values.

Furthermore, cultural projects enable local authorities to get access to creative artistic methods, such as cultural mapping and visioning. Those methods provide insights into the diverse cultural assets and resources present in the community, fostering a more holistic understanding of its potential. Artistic visioning exercises engage community members in envisioning their ideal urban environment, allowing local authorities to align their development strategies with the collective aspirations of the residents. By grounding urban development plans in community-driven data and creative insights, cultural projects facilitate more context-sensitive and sustainable approaches.

V. In resource-limited governments, such as shrinking municipalities, where local authorities are often not able to ensure the provision of essential public services to meet the needs of city dwellers, cultural NGOs have been found to bridge the gap and ensure the larger provision of accessible cultural services, especially for vulnerable and marginalized groups.

Firstly, cultural NGOs serve as essential conduits in ensuring the provision of accessible cultural services for diverse population groups. As intermediaries between

governments and communities, these NGOs possess the expertise and knowledge to design and implement culturally relevant programs that cater to the interests and needs of different demographic segments, who are often excluded from cultural services provided by private or governmental institutions.

Secondly, participatory cultural projects spearheaded by cultural NGOs actively address socio-economic challenges faced by vulnerable social groups, exemplified by Kitev's project of the Free University or their collaborative activity with a community colleague to provide certified 'Ausbildung' courses for refugees. By focusing on empowerment through practical training and creative expression, these projects equip marginalized populations with valuable skills, fostering socio-economic integration and self-reliance. Participants gain access to new opportunities and potential pathways for socio-economic advancement, leading to increased employability and economic prospects. By leveraging participatory cultural projects to tackle socio-economic challenges, cultural NGOs amplify their impact as agents of positive change, promoting social justice and equality in resource-limited governments.

VI. In the realm of local administration, fostering effective interdepartmental communication is essential for cohesive urban development and strategic planning, particularly in shrinking cities. Participatory culture, as a widely accessible and inclusive domain, facilitates the expansion of partnership networks between different departments. By engaging diverse departments in collaboration on cultural projects—such as urban development, cultural, and property departments—participatory initiatives stimulate stable and dynamic communication channels between them. Through these interdepartmental interactions, local administration gains the opportunity to foster integrated strategic planning processes that lead to more comprehensive and cohesive urban development.

5.5. Conclusions and recommendations

Each of the publications (presented as chapters in this dissertation) draws its own conclusions. However, in this section, I present the final conclusions that have resulted from my overall research project.

First and foremost, my research expands the understanding of urban culture and its role in shrinking cities. The data collected in the two shrinking cities, Riga and Oberhausen, allowed me to look beyond the widely known role of urban culture as a tool for economic and physical regeneration. My data highlights the important *role of urban culture in the governance of shrinking cities*. The data from the two case studies reveal a typology categorizing culture into three distinct types: institutional culture; traditional or folklore culture; and participatory culture. The later type—the participatory culture—presents the most potential for local governments to engage in urban and community development processes. As my data shows, participatory culture has the ability to strengthen civil society, improve social cohesion, enhance interdepartmental communication within local administration, and build collaborative networks with actors who possess capabilities generally lacking in the public sector of shrinking cities.

Moreover, previous studies, as well as my data, reveal that cultural policy and strategy represent one of the most 'marginalized' sectors in cities. In Germany, for example, culture is a voluntary task of local municipalities, whereas sectors such as healthcare and education

are mandatory tasks that municipalities are legally required to perform. In the context of reduced public budgets or budget deficits, which is frequently linked with population decline, the cultural field is often in a state of precarity. This situation leads to a reduced provision of cultural services and activities, and also to a decreased number of employees working in cultural departments. This affects the ability of local governments to allocate external funding for cultural projects and provide sufficient level of cultural services.

Therefore, the second conclusion underscored by my data concerns the increasing role of third-sector organizations in the local governance of shrinking cities. Third-sector organizations include non-governmental organizations (e.g., sociocultural centers) and neighborhood or community associations. Those actors possess a unique set of resources and capabilities to develop efficient and place-based governance innovations, as observed in the two shrinking cities I studied. These capabilities include creativity, the ability to experiment, allocate additional financial and human resources, and maintain trust with and knowledge of local communities. Through third-sector organizations, which act as mediators between local administration and residents, local governments are able to collect relevant data to inform their strategic decisions, strengthen civil society, and learn new methods to engage with communities.

For participatory culture to realize its potential as a productive force for urban governance in shrinking cities, it first needs to be recognized by the local government, preferably by the employees in the department that occupies a central position in urban strategy-making, such as the strategic department of urban development. Besides, it is important that the city has strong formal institutions engaged with participatory culture, such as sociocultural centers or cultural non-governmental organizations. Individual artist and activists have limited ability to engage in formal governance networks. Under conditions of limited resources to support participatory culture in shrinking cities, local governments and cultural third-sector organizations develop adaptive strategies, both formal and informal, to provide mutual assistance. This collaborative engagement often results in long-lasting and mutually beneficial networks. The symbiotic nature of relations between local governments and third-sector organizations is crucial for maintaining cultural and sociocultural services in shrinking cities, particularly those targeting vulnerable and marginalized groups.

The conclusions provide important insights for drawing recommendations for municipalities in shrinking cities. The literature review and my findings suggest that culture in shrinking cities offers a broad range of methods to enhance the quality of life. In some cases, culture can stimulate the economy, attract desired populations, provide new functions for derelict buildings, or improve urban governance. I do not dismiss the previous studies on the economic, marketing, and physically regenerative role of culture in shrinking cities. Rather, I propose that awareness of these diverse possibilities can provide local governments and urban practitioners with a variety of options for governing and managing shrinking cities through culture. However, when selecting a cultural strategy or method to address specific urban issues, it is important to be conscious of the type of network being shaped around it and the type of culture being utilized. For example, collaborations with the private sector are more likely to contribute to economically driven solutions, while collaborations with cultural NGOs and neighborhood associations that engage with participatory culture can stimulate civic empowerment and innovative community development methods. It is crucial for the government employees involved in urban development to be aware of the types of culture and the diverse population groups they

engage with and to allocate sufficient financial support to institutions representing different types of culture.

As a concluding remark, I find it worth mentioning that within the growing threat of climate change and the urgent shifts towards climate policies, the role of the cultural sector and cultural policy cannot be overstated. With the increasing focus on climate-related policies such as the European Green Deal and the analogous Green New Deal in the USA and South Korea, there is a need for a profound transition from carbon-intensive to carbon-neutral industries. In the coming decades, many regions will inevitably undergo economic shifts. Thus, finding alternative place-based industries becomes a core mission for municipalities, regions, and states. While industrialization has been a major cause of urban shrinkage in the 20th century, it is reasonable to assume that industrial decarbonization strategies might further contribute to population decline, especially in smaller urban areas dependent on these industries.

In the search for a new carbon-neutral economic base, regions are increasingly turning to digital technologies and cultural industries. Cultural industries are considered one of the most sustainable and carbon-neutral industries because they do not rely on material production and resource extraction but on locally embedded tangible and intangible resources and people's capabilities. Hence, similar to the post-industrial urban restructuring witnessed in the 1980s and 1990s, the significance of cultural strategic development for declining urban areas is being redefined in the contemporary era of climate change politics. This shift underscores the relevance of the subject matter examined in this thesis. Therefore, I hope my research opens the door to further inquiry into the role of cultural strategies in shrinking cities in the era of climate-related policies.

5.6. References for chapters 'Introduction' & 'Discussion and conclusion'

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