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The everyday politics of urban shrinkage

Negotiating “decline” in two medium-sized cities

Le Borgne, S.F.

Publication date

2024

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Le Borgne, S. F. (2024). *The everyday politics of urban shrinkage: Negotiating “decline” in two medium-sized cities*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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SUMMARY

In this thesis, I analyse the everyday lived reality of urban shrinkage and the associated power struggles in and over urban space. Examining the everyday politics of urban shrinkage, I draw on ethnographic studies in two medium-sized French cities experiencing long-term shrinkage, Dieppe and Nevers, to explore how ordinary urban shrinkage is experienced and negotiated by residents in everyday politics.

This thesis draws on existing scholarship on urban shrinkage. It extends this work by foregrounding new aspects of everyday urban shrinkage and its politics, and contributing new perspectives on current conceptualisations of the phenomenon.

In the dissertation, drawing on approaches from urban studies, geography and anthropology, I develop a new conceptual approach to urban shrinkage. I conceptualise urban shrinkage as a lived, political and ordinary process of urban change: felt, perceived and negotiated in everyday life, involving relations of unequal power, and unfolding in non-spectacular ways in ordinary cities.

Throughout the dissertation, I identify four key themes in residents' everyday experience and negotiation of urban shrinkage: the selective production and mobilisation of symbols of "decline"; the negotiation of territorial stigmatisation; the recomposition of social capital; and the negotiation of socio-spatial change through sensory politics. While the first two themes

involve meaning-making processes and struggles, the latter two connect more directly to the realm of social networks and encounters. Through these four themes, shrinkage shapes urban experiences profoundly and prompts a diversity of negotiation strategies.

The ongoing process of negotiating change involves power struggles between various groups at various scales, from the national level to domestic space, and urban inequalities are at the core of the differentiated experience and negotiation of shrinkage. This process reflects and produces what I call the *everyday politics of shrinkage*. Throughout these pages, I show that the everyday politics of shrinkage do not necessarily take place in the form of formal, explicit or purposeful discourses and practices. On the contrary, the negotiation of shrinkage is often inconspicuous and informal. While the everyday politics of shrinkage do not always entail antagonistic relations or recognisably contentious issues, the political aspect of the negotiation of shrinkage lies in its relation to urban inequalities: inequalities in social capital and the support networks it gives access to, unequal power to impose or contest urban representations, and unequal capacities to craft pleasing urban sensescapes.

Moreover, I show that the everyday politics associated with the everyday experience and negotiation of shrinkage are differentiated according to the intersectional positioning of residents and often have ambivalent outcomes. The experiences and negotiations of urban shrinkage play out differently along lines of class, gender, age and political orientation. While their outcomes sometimes reinforce urban inequalities, these processes sometimes redraw existing power relations in unexpected ways – in certain cases, less privileged urban populations may experience or mobilise some of the phenomena associated with urban shrinkage not so much as problems, but as relative advantages.

I conclude the dissertation by suggesting that urban shrinkage can be

understood as a multidimensional process of urban change constituted of structural trends including economic downturn, population decreases, employment decline and socioeconomic impoverishment, characterised by a scalar interplay between drivers of shrinkage at the global and national scales, trends of decline at the regional and urban scales, *and* the experience and negotiation of shrinkage at the micro scale: the individual, community and neighbourhood level. At this micro scale, urban shrinkage should be understood as a phenomenon that is experiential, subjective and political.

This approach to the everyday politics of shrinkage, which draws on a dialogue between different perspectives in urban research, across urban studies, geography, sociology, anthropology and planning, proposes a new contribution to urban shrinkage scholarship. Furthermore, through an engagement with scholarly work on urban symbolic politics, territorial stigmatisation and urban sensory politics, my research contributes to several current debates in urban studies. Finally, through the theoretical discussion of the everyday politics of ordinary urban shrinkage, my research speaks to broader debates within urban studies on the everyday politics of urban change processes.

SAMENVATTING

In dit proefschrift analyseer ik de alledaagse realiteit van stedelijke krimp en de daarmee gepaard gaande machtsstrijd in en over de stedelijke ruimte. Ik onderzoek de alledaagse politiek van stedelijke krimp aan de hand van etnografisch onderzoek in twee middelgrote Franse steden die te maken hebben met langdurige krimp, Dieppe en Nevers, om te onderzoeken hoe alledaagse stedelijke krimp wordt ervaren en bedongen door bewoners in de alledaagse politiek.

Deze scriptie is gebaseerd op bestaande literatuur over stedelijke krimp. Het breidt dit werk uit door nieuwe aspecten van alledaagse stedelijke krimp en de politiek ervan op de voorgrond te plaatsen en nieuwe perspectieven te bieden op de huidige conceptualisering van het fenomeen.

In het proefschrift ontwikkel ik een nieuwe conceptuele benadering van stedelijke krimp op basis van benaderingen uit de stedelijke studies, geografie en antropologie. Ik conceptualiseer stedelijke krimp als een doorleefd, politiek en alledaags proces van stedelijke verandering: gevoeld, waargenomen en bedongen in het dagelijks leven, waarbij ongelijke machtsverhoudingen een rol spelen en dat zich op niet-spectaculaire manieren ontvouwt in gewone steden.

Door het proefschrift heen identificeer ik vier belangrijke thema's in de alledaagse ervaring en onderhandeling van bewoners over stedelijke krimp: de selectieve productie en mobilisatie van symbolen van 'verval'; de

onderhandeling over territoriale stigmatisering; de heropbouw van sociaal kapitaal; en de onderhandeling over sociaal-ruimtelijke verandering door middel van zintuiglijke politiek. Terwijl de eerste twee thema's te maken hebben met betekenisgevende processen en strijd, zijn de laatste twee directer verbonden met het domein van sociale netwerken en ontmoetingen. Door deze vier thema's geeft krimp een diepgaande vorm aan stedelijke ervaringen en roept het een verscheidenheid aan onderhandelingsstrategieën op.

Het voortdurende proces van onderhandelen over verandering gaat gepaard met machtsstrijd tussen verschillende groepen op verschillende schaalniveaus, van het nationale niveau tot de huiselijke ruimte, en stedelijke ongelijkheden vormen de kern van de gedifferentieerde ervaring van en onderhandeling over krimp. Dit proces weerspiegelt en produceert wat ik de alledaagse politiek van krimp noem. Door deze pagina's heen laat ik zien dat de alledaagse politiek van krimp niet noodzakelijkerwijs plaatsvindt in de vorm van formele, expliciete of doelgerichte discoursen en praktijken. Integendeel, de onderhandelingen over krimp zijn vaak onopvallend en informeel. Hoewel de alledaagse politiek van krimp niet altijd antagonistische relaties of herkenbaar controversiële kwesties met zich meebrengt, ligt het politieke aspect van de onderhandeling over krimp in haar relatie tot stedelijke ongelijkheden: ongelijkheden in sociaal kapitaal en de ondersteunende netwerken waartoe dit toegang geeft, ongelijke macht om stedelijke representaties op te leggen of te betwisten, en ongelijke capaciteiten om aangename stedelijke zintuigen te creëren.

Bovendien laat ik zien dat de alledaagse politiek die gepaard gaat met de alledaagse ervaring van en onderhandeling over krimp gedifferentieerd is op basis van de intersectionele positionering van bewoners en vaak ambivalente uitkomsten heeft. De ervaringen en onderhandelingen van stedelijke krimp spelen zich verschillend af langs lijnen van klasse, geslacht, leeftijd en politieke oriëntatie. Terwijl de uitkomsten soms stedelijke ongelijkheden versterken, hertekenen deze processen soms bestaande machtsverhoudingen op onverwachte manieren - in bepaalde gevallen kunnen minder bevoorrechte

stedelijke bevolkingsgroepen sommige verschijnselen die samenhangen met stedelijke krimp niet zozeer als problemen ervaren of mobiliseren, maar als relatieve voordelen.

Ik sluit het proefschrift af met de suggestie dat stedelijke krimp kan worden opgevat als een multidimensionaal proces van stedelijke verandering dat bestaat uit structurele trends, waaronder economische neergang, bevolkingsafname, afname van werkgelegenheid en sociaaleconomische verarming, gekenmerkt door een scalaire wisselwerking tussen aanjagers van krimp op mondiaal en nationaal niveau, trends van krimp op regionaal en stedelijk niveau, en de ervaring van en onderhandeling over krimp op microschaal: het individuele, gemeenschaps- en buurtniveau. Op deze microschaal moet stedelijke krimp worden gezien als een ervaringsgericht, subjectief en politiek fenomeen.

Deze benadering van de alledaagse politiek van krimp, die put uit een dialoog tussen verschillende perspectieven in stedelijk onderzoek, dwars door stedelijke studies, geografie, sociologie, antropologie en planning heen, stelt een nieuwe bijdrage voor aan de stedelijke krimpwetenschap. Door aan te sluiten bij wetenschappelijk werk over stedelijke symboolpolitiek, territoriale stigmatisering en stedelijke zintuiglijke politiek draagt mijn onderzoek bovendien bij aan verschillende actuele debatten in stedelijke studies. Door de theoretische discussie over de alledaagse politiek van gewone stedelijke krimp, spreekt mijn onderzoek tot slot tot bredere debatten binnen de stedelijke studies over de alledaagse politiek van stedelijke veranderingsprocessen.