



# Affordable Housing as a Spatial Planning Tool for Shrinking Cities. Case of Poland

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**Abstract.** According to recent studies, almost all Polish medium and big cities (apart from Bielsko-Biała, Kraków, Olsztyn, Rzeszów, Warsaw and Zielona Góra) are shrinking. Paradoxically, population outflow does not cause an increase in availability of homes, and due to withdrawal of investors and lack of funds for modernisation, it leads to degradation of resources and actually results in decreased availability of homes in the affordable housing sector. This article concerns the housing policy in shrinking cities. It presents the results of evaluation of the housing policy in selected Polish cities (Bytom, Sosnowiec, Sopot) affected to various degrees by depopulation. The evaluation was performed on the basis of the results of studies on shrinking cities in Europe and in the USA.

**Keywords:** Shrinking cities · Affordable housing · Depopulation  
Housing policy

## 1 Introduction

According to demographic forecasts, by 2050 Poland will have lost 4.5 million inhabitants, i.e. slightly more than 12% of the population [5]. The projected demographic losses will not be evenly distributed: in some of the voivodeships the decrease will exceed 20%, while in Mazowieckie [Mazovian] and Pomorskie [Pomeranian] Voivodeships there will be no decrease, or it will be less than 3%. A change in the demographic structure of the society is also forecast: by 2050, people aged 65+ will constitute 1/3 of the population, and their number as compared to 2013 will increase by 5.4 million. On the other hand, the population of children, the youth and working people will shrink significantly. Even though over 54% of the global population live in urban areas and according to projections by 2050 this number is expected to reach 70%, in Poland the process of shrinking is mostly observed in cities. At present only 6 of Polish cities with the population exceeding 100,000 people do not lose their inhabitants, but by 2050 even the capital: Warsaw will be losing people (2.2% as compared to 2015). Around the year 2020, the total population decrease in cities is to be 100,000 per year, and after 2030-140,000 - as if we deleted one and a half of the 23 Polish cities of 100,000 inhabitants from the map every year. The fastest shrinking cities are those which - mainly due to deindustrialisation - lose their social and economic functions; in the next 33 year Zabrze, Bytom and Tarnów will lose almost 50% of population [6].

Globally, the shrinking of cities has been observed for decades (in Europe since the 1960s, in North America and Canada - since the 1950s), however, for Poland and other post-socialist countries this is a relatively new phenomenon. Our population has been growing since WWII. If we compare the census data from 2002 and 2011, the total increase was still about 0.7%, however, a decrease in urban population was also observed (approx. 1%). It is assumed that the processes of de-urbanisation started in Poland around the year 1999, when advancing transformation finally put an end to the social and economic process of the socialist system.

The problem of shrinking cities is permanently present in the discourse concerning urban development (e.g. [7–9]). There are studies on American cities [1], European cities [2, 3], or global studies on the subject [10]. There have been more and more studies on shrinking cities in Poland [6, 11–13], and some of them also concern the strategies used to counteract depopulation [14–16]. A separate category of publications are those concerning housing in the context of depopulation [1, 4, 17].

## 2 Polish Context and Reasons Behind the Shrinking of Cities

There are several reasons for depopulation in Poland, which can be similar to those in other parts of Europe [18]:

- (1) economic reasons: collapse of the labour market (deindustrialisation, privatisation of large work establishments), stagnation and economic recession, land rent and speculations,
- (2) changes in distribution of functionalities: the basic functions in city centres are displaced by banks, public administration and business, the other functions are allocated to industrial parks, shopping malls or functional zones (e.g. the Culture Zone in Katowice);
- (3) suburbanisation and spatial changes in population distribution;
- (4) migration to bigger cities and abroad;
- (5) natural population decrease (more deaths than births), aging society.

Apart from those aspects, we must remember that there are also some specific features which do not always allow for implementation of good practices used elsewhere. Socialist history of Poland has influenced the specificity of the process of shrinking cities. The cities that lose their inhabitants the quickest are those that were strongly industrialised after WWII, where a lot of people came from the countryside [19] and large housing estates were built for them in industrialised technology, to the detriment of the historical urban tissue. After the factories were closed, some of those people simply went back home. The structure of development in historical city centres, influenced by the socialist system, is also a specific problem. After the war, city centres were nationalised and handed over to city administration. Flats were let at cost prices, and so no ongoing repairs were possible, therefore today, in the historical cities centres, in the most precious architectural tissue, we can find underinvested council homes. After shifting to the free market system, some of the flats were privatised - they were sold to the tenants at only a token rate, some remained with the city. As a result of that

process we have a mosaic ownership structure, hard to manage. In shrinking cities where - due to lack of investor interest - the resources have not been commercialised, there is also a problem of keeping the resources at an appropriate level (In contrary, in successful cities, the flats are being redeemed, and affordable flats in city centres vanishes).

Specific situation of Polish depopulating cities is also affected by:

- large housing estates built in industrialised technology, whose social status is much more diversified than e.g. in Paris. Some of them were built in very good locations;
- in 1999, as a result of an administrative reform, the number of voivodeships - and consequently of voivodeship capital cities - was reduced from 49 to 16. For 33 cities this meant a huge decrease in significance and loss of administrative functions;
- after Poland joined the EU in 2004, many attractive labour markets were opened. As soon as in 2006, one million Poles migrated abroad. According to the Polish Central Statistical Office in 2016 there were 2.5 million Polish emigrants;
- as a result of competition of new homes, local plans and land use plans are prepared in excess by the municipalities. According to the "Report on Economic Losses and Social Costs of Uncontrolled Urbanisation in Poland" [12] demographic capacity of land according to local regulations in 2013 was 229,000,000 people, i.e. over 6.5 times more than the demographic projections for Poland for 203;
- lack of cadastral tax and no chances for its introduction;
- Warsaw-centric approach to housing policy. Central regulations still mainly concern an increase in the number of new flats;
- relatively small saturation of the housing market (according to Eurostat, in 2015 over 40% of Poles lived in over-crowded flats, which is more than double the EU average [33]), poor condition of a lot of housing resources.

### 3 Susceptibility of Affordable Housing to Depopulation

The housing sector is sensitive to demographic changes [1, 4, 17]. Paradoxically, population outflow does not cause an increase in availability of homes, and due to withdrawal of investors and lack of funds for modernisation, it leads to degradation of resources and actually results in decreased availability of homes in the affordable housing sector [2]. Moreover, a certain group of activities used to counteract depopulation may deepen the housing problems of impecunious people. Studies on American shrinking cities: Detroit, New Orleans, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh [1] show that such a negative impact is caused e.g. by unskilful revitalisation: if the revitalisation processes are not combined with social activities and with special care for the existing neighbouring structures, they may cut the inhabitants off the benefits of the modernisation, push them to the peripheries and lead to loss of the social capital linked to the established social structure. Richard Florida himself, 15 years after he published his famous book *The Rise of the Creative Class* [20], where he pointed to the key role in urban development planning addressing the creative class - i.e. people of creative professions and the bohemia - admits in his latest book *The New Urban Crisis: How Our Cities Are Increasing Inequality, Deepening Segregation, and Failing the Middle*

*Class—and What We Can Do About It* [21] that focusing only on the creative class may ultimately lead to social stratification and actually aggravate the problems of cities. Prioritising activities aimed at spectacular infrastructural, cultural or commercial investments, may result in limiting the funds that should be dedicated to affordable housing. In Poland the problem is, paradoxically, intensified by EU subsidies, with housing investments being excluded. As a result, some of the investments, particularly showy entertainment and sports facilities (white elephants) and infrastructural facilities, are unnecessary and only generate high costs of maintenance for the future [22]. These costs are then a burden to shrinking cities. Moreover, if revitalisation is not combined with reduction of urban sprawl and a regional housing policy as a factor preventing outflow of people, it can be inefficient. Uncontrolled fight for the inhabitants which cannot be reduced without redistribution of a certain part of local taxes, leads to the sprawl of residential development to the suburbs: open and potentially environmentally valuable.

In the case of co-existence of growing and shrinking cities, the uniform central housing policy becomes futile; the cities with decreasing population require different tools than growing cities [23, 24]. An example here can be the central housing Policy in Poland, with the construction of new homes as a priority. The tool that can be useful in Warsaw is detrimental to regions undergoing depopulation. It is easier for the developers to construct new buildings on suburban plots instead of modernising the existing ones in the cities.

## 4 Housing Policy Strategies Against Depopulation

As there is no single model nor cause for the shrinking of cities, there is also no single, reliable cure. Activities undertaken by cities against depopulation can be basically divided into three groups: (1) adaptive, (2) growth-oriented [15] and (3) ignoring the phenomenon. The first two groups of activities can be performed simultaneously. The first group includes all such strategies as: planning for shrinkage [25], shrink smart or right sizing, which are based on a belief that the shrinking of cities is a natural phase of development, and with appropriate management it can improve the quality of life in cities. An exceptionally good example of a consistent strategy against depopulation is Leipzig - an industrial city in eastern Germany.

### 4.1 The Leipzig Strategy

The outflow of inhabitants from Leipzig started in 1966 and it accelerated significantly in 1989 after German reunification, when the population decreased by 12% in only 10 years. As a result of undertaken activities, in 1999 depopulation stopped, and then, in 2001, the number of inhabitants started growing. In years 2011–2013 the increase was 2.8% per year [30]. Even though after the fall of the Berlin Wall the process of city shrinking actually affected all the eastern German cities, Leipzig was the first to accept it and it immediately started acting to change the apparently negative trend into an opportunity [26]. The other cities, e.g. Dresden or Halle, ignored the phenomenon (cf. strategy 3) until the year 2000 when the general debate on shrinking cities (*schrimpffende Städte*) started

in Germany. Activities related to depopulation in Leipzig focused around three main axes: (1) preservation of architectural heritage, (2) creation of public spaces and green areas in abandoned places and demolishing vacancies (dilapidated housing estates) and (3) creation and support for neighbourhood local centres [14]. From the housing policy's perspective, the most interesting axis of actions, the so called 'patchwork urbanism', is the most interesting [16]. In years 1997–2007, as a result of strategy implementation, 11,390 homes were demolished in Leipzig [26]. It was financed under federal (e.g. *Stadtumbau Ost*) and central programmes, and according to their assumptions, no permanent building structures could be erected in those sites for the next 10 years. Thus, the city was implementing the 'greener through fewer houses' strategy. Therefore, post-demolishing sites were turned into grasslands, small parks, artistic installations (e.g. sponsored by the Urban II EU programme) and gained temporary social functions, such as pop up [18]. A significant part of demolished buildings were large prefabricated housing estates built in the post-war period, therefore the process was accompanied by efforts to increase the standard of the remaining homes. In parallel, a programme entitled "Home Guardians" was carried out in Leipzig, under which the city facilitated re-occupation and use (sometimes temporary) of abandoned homes. The city would bring together the owners and potential tenants and provided legal assistance for temporary tenancy agreement signing. Even though Leipzig strategy is criticised for a certain dose of chaos, lack of a coordinated demolishing plan and to high costs [14], it should be appreciated for efficiency, and we must also remember its pioneering role and learn from its mistakes.

#### 4.2 Collaborative Housing as an Efficient Tool for Depopulation – The Example of Rotterdam

An solution which seems to perfectly address the problem of depopulation is collaborative housing, which is a form of obtaining homes where the basic rules include: (1) the non-for-profit idea, (2) participatory and (3) co-operative-based nature of the undertaking from the beginning of the designing process at least until the moment of occupying the premises and (4) group initiation by future tenants<sup>1</sup>. Collaborative housing can be executed through participation in a construction group, in a small housing co-operative or in co-housing.

The use of collaborative housing in the process of regeneration and revitalisation of building that are degraded not only in technical terms but mainly morally degraded, can be presented on the example of a regeneration case study of the Wallisblok block in the emptying neighbourhood of Spangen in Rotterdam (the Netherlands). It is important that due to the investment the quality and security in the neighbourhood were improved significantly, the outflow of the inhabitants was stopped, and new ones were attracted, without causing the negative processes of gentrification: a significant number of local inhabitants remained.

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<sup>1</sup> It concerns the very group initiation, it does not mean that the conditions for initiative development cannot be established by third parties, e.g. the city or a non-for-profit institution.

**Wallisblok, De Dichterijke Vrijheid 07 Rotterdam.** In 2003 the city of Rotterdam decided to solve the problem of the degraded, dangerous and depopulating neighbourhood of Spangen. It started from analysing the Wallisblok block from the 1930s, located near the Schie canal. This dilapidated and partly abandoned complex, originally with very interesting architecture, comprised 75 small, mostly abandoned labourers' homes. It was in a catastrophic condition: the windows were smashed, the roof was leaking, the foundations were disturbed and soaked with water and so it was impossible to attract private investors. Preliminary financial analyses showed that the overhaul outlays - apart from the purchase price and foundation repair cost - would be equal to the value of the building after renovation. Apart from the costs, potential investors were deterred by the neighbourhood's bad reputation. In this difficult situation, the architects that were engaged to evaluate the condition of the complex (Hulshof Architecten) proposed to give the flats to future inhabitants and to use the potential of collaborative housing to regenerate the development. The Collectief Particulier Opdrachtgeverscha (CPO) scheme - i.e. the Dutch model of a building group - was adopted for the undertaking.

In October 2004 the authorities of Rotterdam announced that they were distributing flats for free, however, future inhabitants had to fulfil certain conditions:

- they had to invest at least 1,000 euro in every square metre of a flat;
- the flat could not be sold or rented for at least a year after investment finalisation;
- the owners of each flat had to get involved in the planning and designing process;
- the designing process had to be supervised by a manager and by architects appointed by the city;
- the building permit design and implementation had to meet the specified quality standards;
- the construction had to start no later than within a year, and the overhauls had to be finished within 6 months from their beginning.

Even after taking all the conditions into account, the offer was attractive: after termination, the process promised a relatively inexpensive high-standard flat in acentral location and a strong group of neighbours. On its part, the city repaired the foundations, and it allowed to totally reconstruct the internal façade of the block even though the building was under building preservation protection (which allowed to increase the interior and improve energy efficiency). Ultimately, 35 out of 200 interested families were selected for the process. The supervision over the undertaking was entrusted to Frans van Hulst from the Steunpunt Wonen studio (today's Urbannerdam) and architect Ineke Hulshof from Hulshof Architects. The architect and the manager took the assisting position in the inhabitants' process of self-organisation and of specifying their needs and capabilities. At first, they defined a set of rules as well as quality and spatial standards.

As it turned out, it was difficult to match expectations of particular families with the existing structure, however, in the end, a compromise was reached. The proposed model of block reorganisation assumed maximum diversity of spatial solutions, best suiting the needs of future inhabitants: flats of different sizes, studios, office spaces and segments with gardens. Attics were also used as residential area. It was determined that every flat would have an independent exit to the outside, new stairs, thermal insulation,

central heating and installations. The inhabitants agreed to share a garden and parts of the terrace on the roof. Future inhabitants were divided into groups which were made responsible for particular construction-process elements (garden, construction, finance). The inhabitants could perform the construction works by themselves, provided that they maintain the established standards, or they could commission the works to the team that was working on the whole complex. The costs of renovation of a single home were calculated at the level of EUR 70 K for a small apartment up to EUR 200 K for a four-storey house. Finally, 41 flats were prepared with the area ranging from 55 to 300 m<sup>2</sup> which - at the end of the process - became privately owned homes belonging to the inhabitants (privatisation was justified in that case, as city homes were dominant in that neighbourhood, so some ownership diversity was needed).

At present the inhabitants have been living there for over 10 years, they are well-integrated and very satisfied with their place of residence. The city of Rotterdam continued such a scheme for consecutive years. Similar works have been carried out for more blocks all over Spangen and so the neighbourhood became a safe and appreciated living area. The key to success seem to be the preliminary conditions established by the city: the fact that the flats were handed over to people on condition that they invest in them and maintain the standards and that they work under the supervision of professionals. The support of the city was also important: patronage over the talks with the bank on loans and with infrastructural companies supervised by the city as well as procedural facilitation. For the sake of the future inhabitants' sense of security, it was important that all the group moves in at the same time. This action also had positive effects: the security evaluation of the block and then of the whole neighbourhood grew on a 1 to 10 scale from 4 to 7. The investment was awarded the Job Dura Prijs 2006 prize awarded every other year for activities changing Rotterdam to the better.

### 4.3 Other Elements

Some other interesting elements in the strategies related to housing, introduced in the depopulation periods, include:

- 'don't move improve' - a bottom-up initiative to revitalise Bronx, carried out in years 1970–2012, where e.g. 320 tenements burned in fires were reconstructed;
- the integrated 'GhettUp' programme, combining the social policy approach with revitalisation in emptying and aging Genova [18];
- British planning basis according to which 80% of new investments must be located in brownfields, which prevents urban sprawl and city centre depopulation.
- financial penalties in German and French cities for misusing or not using homes. Such activity prevents the negative phenomenon of keeping vacancies for speculation purposes;
- support in council home exchange, e.g. by use of simple applications, such as the Dutch Huisjehuisje [31] which is similar to Tinder dating app and which gets tenants with different needs together.
- adding lifts to residential homes (in China, as council funds for such activities are scarce, commercial companies are allowed to fit lifts in buildings and then to collect small fees for their usage).

## 5 Housing Strategies in Polish Cities Against Depopulation

The studies were carried out on three shrinking cities, two of them belongs to Silesian region, that is endangered with depopulation to the greatest degree (Bytom and Sosnowiec) and one from Pomerania, littoral region with observed population increase (Sopot).

Sosnowiec and Bytom are located in Upper Silesia - an industrial conurbation in the south of Poland. Due to industrial heritage and deindustrialisation which occurred in that area after 1989, the whole region has been experiencing a significant outflow of inhabitants. In years 1988–2015 about 340,000 people left the region, which ranks Silesia first among the depopulating voivodeships in Poland. It is projected that by 2020 another 128,000 inhabitants will depart. Population losses are so significant mainly because of loss of jobs in sectors related to industry.

Depopulation processes, even though they mainly occur internally, are particularly severe in Sosnowiec [11]. According to projections, by 2035 as compared with 1988, about 37.8% of people will leave the town, turning Sosnowiec into the most shrinking town in the Silesian Voivodeship. The outflow of people from Bytom is also internal, but also a large share of emigration abroad is involved. It is projected that by 2035, as compared with 1988, the outflow will reach 31.6% of people. In Bytom the problem was exacerbated by the closure of 4 out of 6 hard coal mines being the main employers in the town (in 2012 the unemployment rate in Bytom reached 19.9%) as well as by severe development degradation due to mining damages. As a result of mining operations, the surface of the whole town lowered by 40 m, several housing estates were destroyed and there are periodical rock bursts and subsidence (e.g. in 2011 Karb housing estate was demolished and so were about 50 different tenement houses in 2016). What is interesting though, is that the outflow rate of people from Sosnowiec is higher than from Bytom even despite lower unemployment and smaller degradation of the urban tissue.

**Sosnowiec and Bytom Housing Policy Assessment.** According to an analysis of academics from the University of Silesia [19] almost all the towns in the region, including Bytom and Sosnowiec, have got their strategic and urban planning documents assuming mainly their development; the possible reduction of spatial, demographic, economic structures and infrastructural elements that are included therein are immediately balances by provisions on modernisation, compensation, replacing “the old” with “the new”; no advancing process of growing share of derelict spaces or social and economic structures being under the influence of advanced regress is assumed. In the whole strategy for Bytom the word ‘depopulation’ is mentioned only once.

In their strategies, both Bytom and Sosnowiec [27, 28] underline the need to privatise housing resources, pointing at the same time to the problem of affordability of homes. What is quite striking is that both these towns show that even despite loss of inhabitants the number of people waiting for a council home has not decreased. Bytom also has a problem with housing market stagnation.

**Both Towns Emphasise the Need to Retain Young People.** Bytom does it through an action called: “Homes for the Young” [32] where they provide council homes for a promise of an overhaul, however the flats are in a very poor technical condition (very



often with no bathroom nor heating), and second, there are only a few such flats available every year. Too few for the action to improve the situation. Sosnowiec runs an action called “A Home for a Graduate”, where talented university graduates can rent redecorated homes at a moderate rent price. Due to the form of rental and not sale, the flats remain within the municipality’s assets and they can be let to next generations. Sosnowiec also runs an action called “Self-overhaul” - where flats are handed over for an overhaul, however, it is open to all the inhabitants. Moreover, Sosnowiec offers permanent assistance in reducing the debt of indebted inhabitants of council homes. The town also looks for non-standard solutions that can help with using the potential of affordable housing. In February 2018 it started its cooperation with the Faculty of Architecture at the Silesian University of Technology in order to verify the possibility of implementing the above described collective housing model, as in Rotterdam, in unoccupied facilities owned by the town.

In the policies of Sosnowiec and of Bytom, concerning depopulation, there is also a difference in the form of town management. In Bytom the authorities work with a smaller involvement of the stakeholders from the social and economic zone. The problems are intensified by the fact that an acting mayor was dismissed as a result of a referendum twice. In Sosnowiec, on the other hand, there is stricter cooperation between the town and the economic zone. There are certain actions carried out to encourage investors to invest in the brownfields, which are quite numerous after deindustrialisation. The processes of reindustrialisation are also supported on an ongoing basis.

Sopot is a depopulating city whose situation is, however, completely different than that of the two towns described above. As opposed to Silesia, the region of Trójmiasto (Tri-city) that Sopot is a part of (it includes Grańsk, Sopot, Gdynia and adjacent municipalities), is characterised by a constant growth in the number of inhabitants. Problems with the collapse of the shipbuilding industry in the region is compensated by new, emerging employers, largely related to the tourism potential of the region. The loss of inhabitants in Sopot is therefore mainly related to negative natural growth and suburbanisation: it is the so called apparent depopulation, where the inhabitants leave the core city and move to the suburbs. However, they remain within the metropolitan area and so they do not reduce the potential of the region. The main problem with Sopot is aging population, because the outflow to the suburbs mainly concerns relatively young people. It is projected that by 2050 the natural growth in Sopot will be the smallest in the voivodeship, reaching the rate of  $-10$  per 1,000 inhabitants. The average age in Sopot will be than 52.5 years.

**Sopot Housing Policy Assessment.** An analysis of Sopot’s housing policy [29] shows that the city is trying to respond to emerging phenomena on a current basis. Its priority goals include an increase in the percentage of young people in the city’s housing resources and undertaking activities that could materialise this goal. Some actions are also undertaken to improve the quality of life of seniors. Some of the most interesting activities under the housing policy in Sopot include:

- promoting the model of co-living (of students, young professionals and elderly people) in larger apartments;
- zoning of the city and keeping separate housing policies for particular neighbourhoods, facing different challenges;

- an internet database of homes for exchange - supporting exchange of flats between tenants of council resources (according to the above described mechanism used in the Netherlands). What is more, the system of exchange is also co-ordinated with the neighbouring municipalities;
- preferring families with children, at least for council homes for rent
- exchange of large apartments without a lift, in old buildings, to smaller ones, but better suited to the needs of elderly people (purchase and sales);
- active search for lonely people occupying too large, underinvested flats in order to exchange them for smaller and more comfortable ones;
- limiting privatisation of flats. Sopot, as a tourist destination, is exposed to the loss of residential function and dominance of short-term lease premises as well as homes purchased for speculation purposes.

**Conclusions.** A comparison of the housing policy in Sosnowiec and in Bytom in the aspect of depopulation leads to several conclusions. First of all, Bytom, even though it is in a much worse situation (higher unemployment rate and much more degraded housing resources), initially shows a lower tendency for depopulation than Sosnowiec. Robert Krzysztofik from the University of Silesia [11, 19] points to the fact that the strength of Bytom is its strong local identity related to a large number of inhabitants identifying themselves with the town. Sosnowiec, on the other hand, has a much less clear identity; a significant number of its inhabitants are people who came to the town after WWII.

Bytom starts losing its beneficial position as a result of a policy which ignores the processes of depopulation (type three of depopulation strategy). The latest data shows that unemployment in Sosnowiec, as opposed to Bytom, is decreasing and depopulation can be slowed down a little bit, as compared to the assumptions.

Sopot, despite a better situation than Bytom and Sosnowiec, has a much broader and much better-informed housing policy. The activities performed by the city seem to be aimed at changing the depopulation trend (type two of the depopulation strategy). Observation of depopulation policies of cities exposed to a different degree to depopulation confirms the above noted regularity: cities that are less affected by depopulation seem to react to it quicker. It is noted that local authorities chosen in periodical democratic elections try to belittle or ignore serious problems of depopulation. The reason for this is that after the end of the term of office it is impossible to show that the problem has been reduced. These fears are to some degree justified - the problem of depopulation, particularly in such regions as Upper Silesia, which is affected as a whole, cannot be solved within a 4-year term. If the solution is perceived as the revers of the trend - it will probably never be solved. The observation was confirmed by a situation experienced in 2013 by a scientific consortium from the Silesian University of Technology, the University of Silesia and the Katowice University of Economics, which was trying to raise external funds for a vast research and development programme concerning depopulation of large-panel prefabricated housing estates: none of the Silesian cities affected by the problem of loss of inhabitants was interested in cooperation, even though it did not involve any financial outlays on their part. The municipalities were simply afraid to admit that the depopulation is their problem.

## 6 Summary

After decades of recovery activities, about 40% of European cities with the population of more than twenty thousand people are still shrinking [9]. In view of global demographic changes, even in Poland the trend cannot be reversed completely in predictable future. Still, ignoring the situation seems to be the worst possible strategy. A potential of slowing down the outflow of people from cities undoubtedly seems to be provided by changes attributable to the second demographic transition. Non-traditional households: singles, partnerships, single-gender households or non-family households create a new fashion for urban lifestyle. Gradually, housing preferences are changing, dominated for a certain period of time by dreams of a suburban house with a garden.<sup>2</sup> In order to use the potential of that trend, it is necessary, however, to run a well-informed housing policy against depopulation. A policy which will focus not only on increasing the quality of homes, provide access to green areas and high quality public areas, access to good schools or high quality public transport - i.e. to elements that are traditionally taken into account in revitalisation processes - but also on caring for the balance and social diversity, broadening the possibilities and the number of ways to get a flat (e.g. the potential of collective housing and stopping privatisation of council resources), or inclusion of the inhabitants in activities for the benefit of their own neighbourhood (as in the 'don't move improve' action). Moreover, it seems to be necessary to run a housing policy at all levels: central, local, but also at the completely neglected in Poland regional level.

As city activities in the field of housing will always be a political issue, it is of key importance to inform the society about the problem, its consequences and potential strategies, and awareness of the authorities is also very important. Regardless of whether we consider the shrinking of cities as a natural process which can be turned into success or a negative phenomenon which should be fought down - we cannot remain indifferent to it.

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<sup>2</sup> In Poland that period was in years 1990–2010.

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