

FROM THE URBAN FRINGE - SHRINKING CITIES

TOPIC

Historically, cities have always followed patterns of growth and shrinkage; these cycles were mostly influenced by wars, famine, plagues and later on by industrialization, but with the rise of globalization, an unprecedented phenomenon has emerged - shrinking cities.

Following more than a century of constant urban development triggered by industrialization, the multidimensional process known as 'shrinking cities' appeared only about 40 years ago. Obsolete methods of urban planning coupled with the emerging finance-dominated industry have led to radical spatial and social polarization, coupled with declining demographics and economy.

Recently, cities like Manchester and Leipzig have started to address some of the negative aspects associated with shrinking cities by integrating a part of their built heritage into gentrification and branding strategies. Previous growth orientated frameworks led to an improved image and a growing population; however, a consequence of following the neoliberal dictum in renovation programmes is that existing social problems have been exacerbated. Increased segregation between classes is further reflected and influenced by a marginalized public space and islands of consumerism interspersed within large pockets of urban decay.

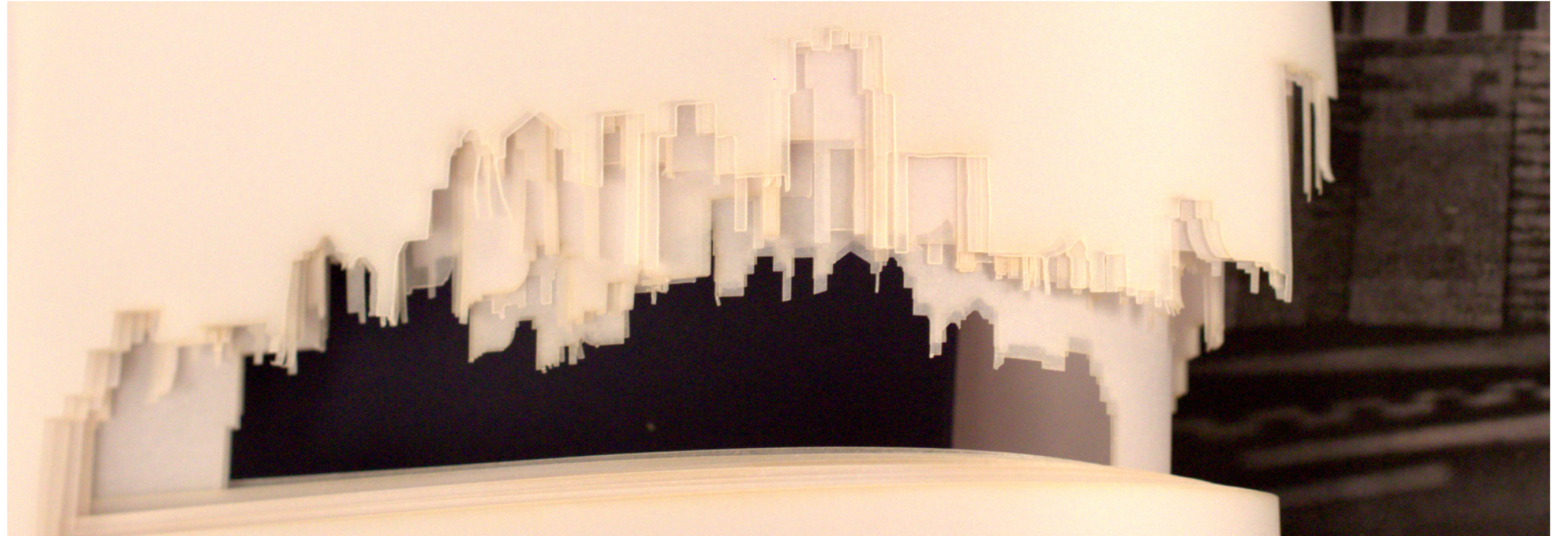
OBJECTIVE

Due to the fact that it is a process partly new in its foundations, shrinkage has been perceived as mainly negative by both planners, politicians and residents.

With five cities as my case study (Manchester, Leipzig, Detroit, Satu Mare and Yubari), my proposal is to explore in depth how architecture as a cultural practice can regenerate these types of cities and help advance knowledge on what could actually be a welcome and positive process of resizing.

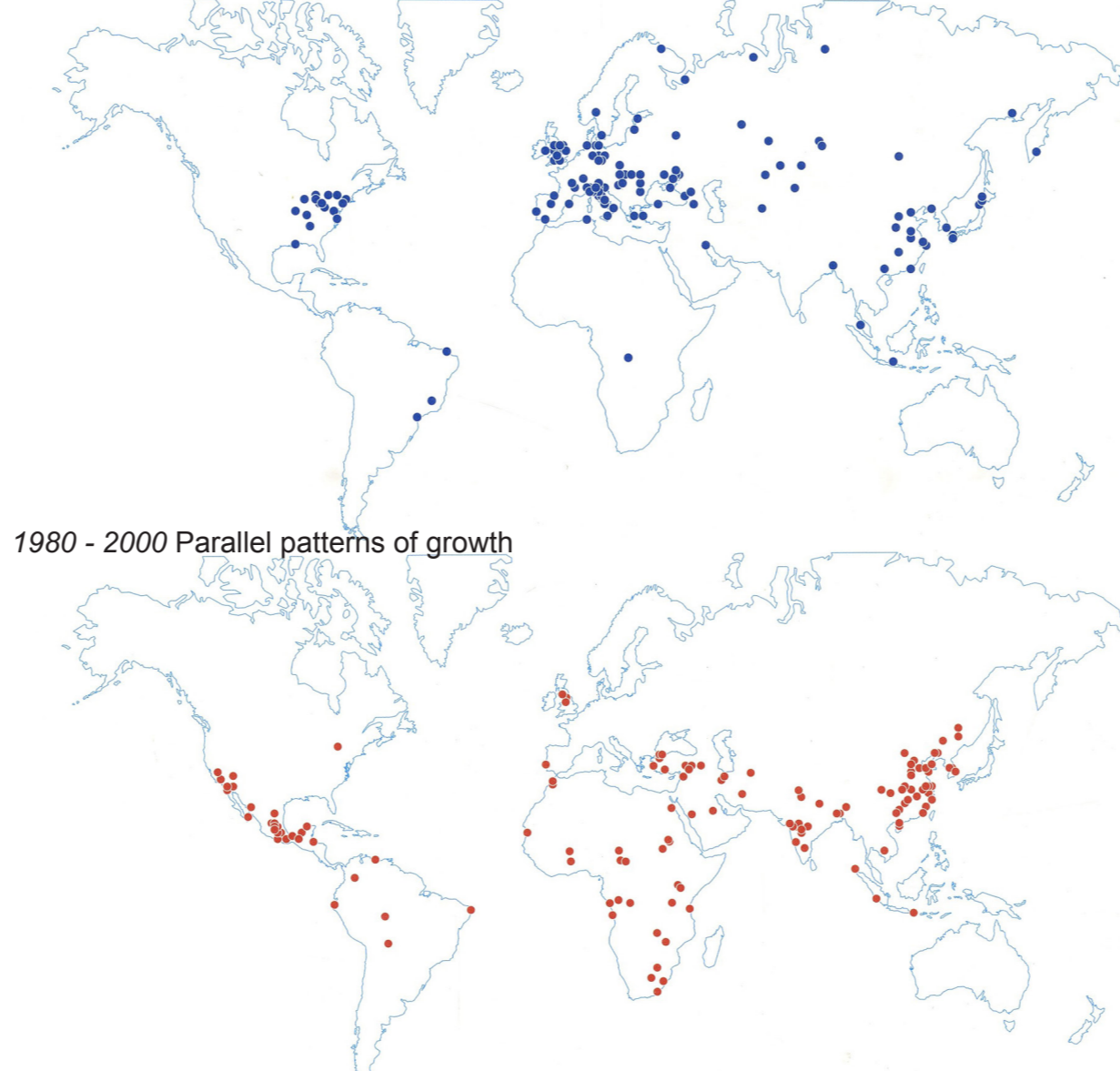
METHODOLOGY

Since the aim of the research is to propose alternative methods of urbanism, qualitative methods are proposed to uncover emerging patterns of growth and shrinkage - observation through interviews, photograph archive, painting and sketches. This information will then be further supported by surveys and statistical data.



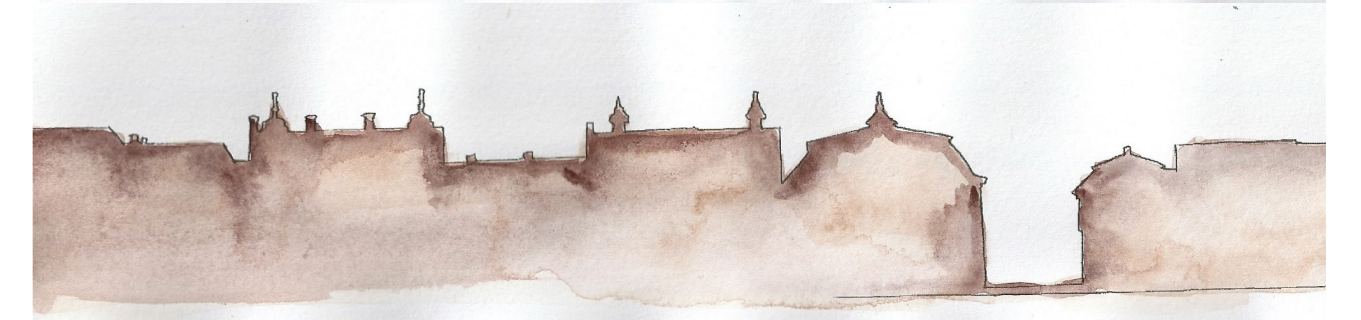
1980 - 2000 Shrinkage becomes a global phenomenon

Detroit. Shrinking Cities Dissertation - Ioana Tamas. Photo courtesy of Mark Garcia.



1980 - 2000 Parallel patterns of growth

Parallel Patterns of shrinkage and growth diagram. Source: Atlas of Shrinking Cities Eds. Philipp Oswalt and Tim Rieniets, 2005



Satu Mare - Jewish Corso. The city used to be a thriving economic centre prior to the dissipation of the community. Visuals: Ioana Tamas

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

Solutions for shrinking cities should take into consideration a wide spectrum of interrelating factors, while also abandoning the traditional growth orientated methods of planning and consider the so-called 'weak-planning' method which brings together perspectives from other disciplines, such as economy and sociology.

On an even broader level, shrinking cities pose questions about our culture and who we have become. As part of globalization, even cities have become commodities which shrink and grow (Manchester) or are destroyed (Yubari) according to capital flow.

Though shrinking cities are perceived as negative, they are places which offer an opportunity for the emergence of new cultures, identities and spontaneous experiences which cannot be quantified or replicated elsewhere for the sole purpose of economic growth. What would the relevance of the architectural profession be in this context?

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