

Host organization: Spatial Foresight

Country: Luxembourg

Organization role: Beneficiary hosting a PhD student

Project Acronym: Re-City

Project start and end date: 2019-2022

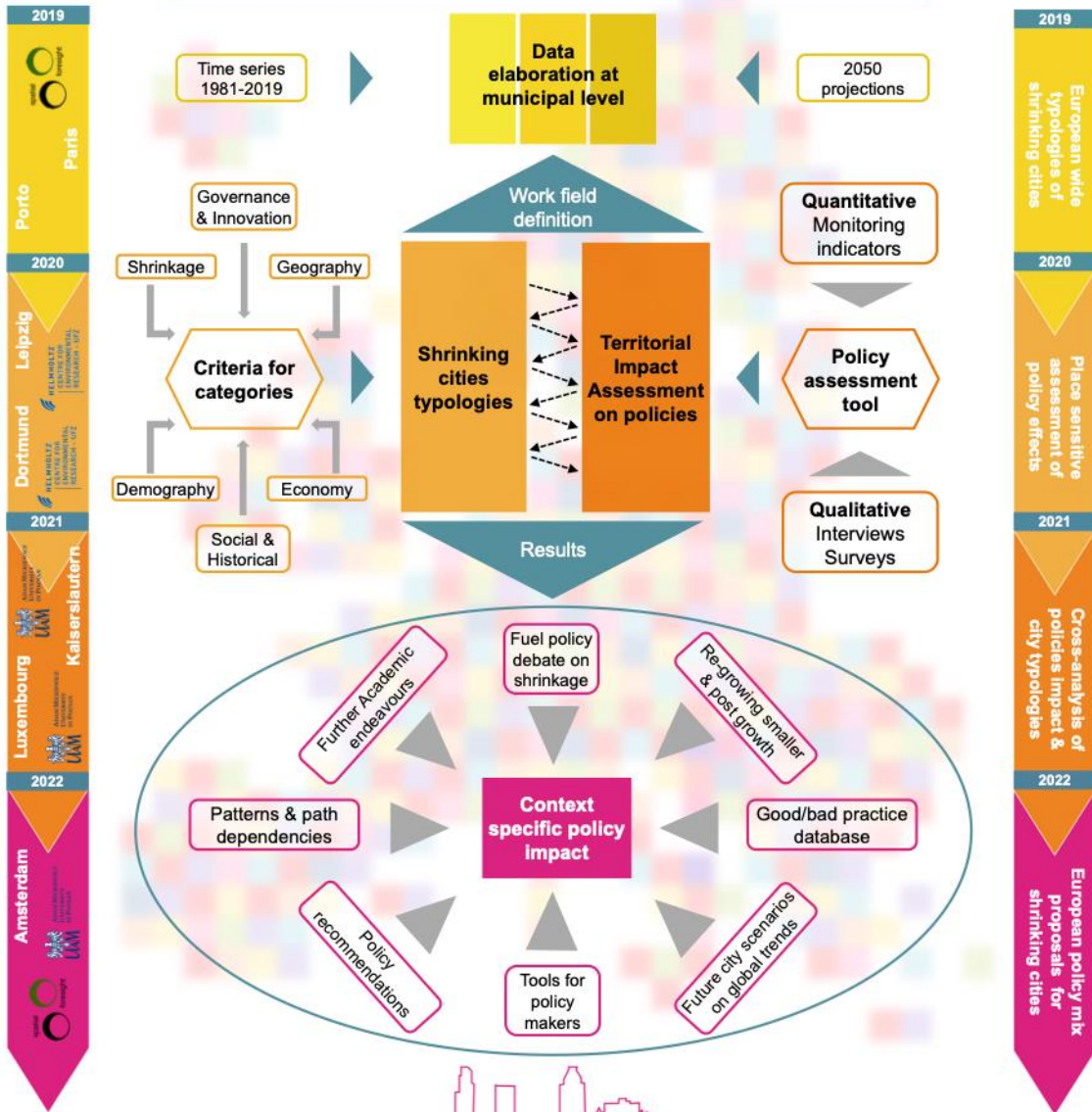
Type of MSC action, H2020: ITN

Understanding the diversity of shrinking cities and their needs for place sensitive policy responses in Europe



MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

How can place sensitive approaches be the way to address shrinkage in the EU & national policy arenas?



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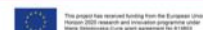


Image 1: Visual representation of the research project presented at the 2019 CITTA conference in Porto (19-20 September 2019); Source: own elaboration.

Your story:

Project objectives and research field:

The aim of the project is to advance European-wide comparable knowledge on shrinking cities and provide insights on policy frameworks suitable for responding to demographic decline in various types of shrinking cities.

This involves the elaboration of a European-wide typology of shrinking cities including the mapping of population decline in different geographical and socio-economic contexts. It furthermore involves conducting territorial impact assessments of various EU policies to understand how they affect shrinking cities.

Tell us why the topic is important and/ or how it brings to advancement in your research field:

In the near future, many more places in Europe will experience demographic and economic decline. Therefore, 'shrinking cities' is likely to become a concern for many more politicians and public decision-makers.

Advancing the knowledge on shrinking cities and what characterises them will help to better understand how to address them in future policymaking.

Furthermore, improving the understanding of how various policies explicitly or implicitly affect shrinking cities is important. Although hardly any public policy addresses shrinking cities, various policies accelerate shrinking processes unintendedly. Some policies also hold the potential to stop or at least cushion shrinking processes. To improve future policy-making and ensure that there is a future for all places in Europe, it is important to understand how policies affect shrinking cities. This knowledge can help to design more place-sensitive policies in future.

What are the benefits of participating in a MSC action?

Participating in Re-City allows us to participate in cutting edge research on shrinking cities and advocate the user dimension. A lot of research conducted is mainly driven by scientific interest and does not always fit the knowledge needs of decision-makers in public authorities and private companies. Being part of the research team and hosting one of the PhD students, we can push the knowledge production in the field to better fit public policy processes.

Participating in Re-City provides us also with firsthand access to the latest research on shrinking cities in Europe and beyond. This can be useful providing policy advice

on place-sensitive policies, as shrinking cities are often overlooked in EU, national and regional policies. At the same time, we know from our territorial foresight activities that shrinkage will become an increasing concern in some parts of Europe in the future.

Participating in an ITN also strengthens our reputation of being more than just a consultancy as it supports our think tank activities.

Did you encounter any challenges during application/ implementation and did you get any help?

Being beneficiary in the project, there were no particular difficulties to underline in the application process, apart from the very high competition, which is natural for such endeavors. Only after three rounds, our application has been successful. Though we learned a lot from the detailed feedback provided on the applications we lost.

The Horizon 2020 online platform runs really smoothly. Despite looking complicated in the beginning, the online procedures are efficient and facilitate the various administrative steps. It would be great if it could also be used for public e-procurement procedures by other EU and national authorities.

An important challenge for private companies involved in ITN projects is the cost coverage. The budget is clearly not sufficient to cover the actual overhead costs and in particular, the working hours needed for the supervision and support of the PhD students, and the many meetings of the project team.

Would you recommend others to apply? What useful advice/ tips can you give them?

Despite the lack of full financial coverage, participation in an ITN can only be recommended. The benefits in terms of research advancement and contributions to the research field can offset the costs.

It is recommended to pay careful attention to the feedback received from the Horizon 2020 evaluators in case the first application is not successful. You will easily notice that these are made with considerable effort. Learning from them for future applications will significantly increase the chances of success.

What strategies did your organization use to attract the fellow/s?

At Spatial Foresight we based our strategy for attracting the fellows on our network. Working with partners all over Europe and being well networked with many universities also beyond this ITN project, allowed us to spread and advertise the ITN opportunity through, both in the academic and non-academic worlds.

Not all applicants understood what it means doing a PhD in a small private company as compared to doing it at a university. Thus, we paid particular attention to this in the interviews to ensure that we selected a candidate ready and able to work on a PhD while being surrounded by colleagues working on policy advice and evaluations for various EU, national and regional clients all over Europe.