

Aalto university, Department of Architecture

Research project “Enhancing liveability of small shrinking cities through co-creation”

An international project analyses and compares local processes of co-creation and placemaking in declining cities.

The project “Enhancing liveability of small shrinking cities through co-creation” examines local initiatives and practices of placemaking in severely shrinking small cities, as well as local, regional and national planning strategies of dealing with urban shrinkage in Finland, Russia and Germany. The purpose of the project is to develop an approach for stimulating context-sensitive and community-led decisions towards enhancing liveability of shrinking cities.

The two-year project is funded by the Academy of Finland and other country-based funding agencies in the framework of the ERA.NET Plus program. It was launched in January 2021 and will be implemented by an international consortium consisting of research teams in Finland, Russia and Germany.

The principle investigator in Finland is postdoctoral researcher **Johanna Lilius** from the Department of Architecture of Aalto University. The team also includes Aalto’s postdoctoral researcher **Alla Bolotova** and a research associate **Ria-Maria Adams**, a PhD candidate in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Vienna. In addition, the project involves several project employees and affiliated master students at Aalto University.

Enhancing the dignity

Shrinking cities have become a worldwide phenomenon with persisting and long-term depopulation as their most distinctive feature. The uneven spatial development increases the number of deprived localities everywhere and turns it into a global challenge. The problem is most severe for small, peripheral cities in structurally weak regions.

Along with declining liveability due to physical negative consequence of urban shrinkage (e.g. abandonment and spatial marginalization, loss of services and amenities), small shrinking cities and their residents experience negative images, even stigmatisation, and dependence on external help and resources. This may lead to communities’ loss of dignity and self-worth. At the same time, these cities remain home to people with community bonds, shared values, and place attachment.

By engaging with local knowledge and activism the project aims to contribute to enhancing the dignity of these, often deprived, communities through raising their self-respect and fostering self-determined solutions. In cooperation with local actors, the project will facilitate connections between local initiatives and policy-making.

In Finland, the municipality of Puolanka was chosen as a main case study, along with Kemijärvi as the second case study. There will be two rounds of fieldwork at the case study locations during the year 2021. Through the in-depth empirical research and in cooperation with local residents and actors, the researchers will explore local initiatives, bringing out the perspectives and opinions of local residents about what a viable and vibrant municipality is in their own opinion. The project will also produce a number of research articles and a practice-oriented brochure.

For more information:

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