

Abstract

Necessary adjustments to the demographic change in peripheral rural towns and communities require regional courses of action. Linked to this is the consolidation of municipal administrations, the re- and deconstruction of public infrastructure, which leads among other things, to a decrease of the quantity of schools. Against the background of the shrinking process, which is unpopular and hard to mediate, new instruments of controls were developed, for instance the „masterplan services of general interest". Therefore it is up to the communities to learn how and where the existing functions of services of public interest are to adjust. Long-term consequences in handling the existing buildings are barely explored so far and there are no solutions for conservation and /or conversion. This problem arises from the conventionalism to usual structures.

The research project „revitalization of social infrastructures lying idle in the model region South Harz-Kyffhäuser" in North Thuringia and South Saxony-Anhalt follows seamlessly the pilot program „Demographic change - shaping the future of rural regions" of the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development (2007-2009). In the Kyffhäuserkreis und rural district Mansfeld-South Harz this project could already arrange a strong sensitization of the communities in handling sectoral adjustments. The „Forschungsinitiative Zukunft Bau" from the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development affects the possibilities for revitalization and on the "too much" of the shrinking process – the lying idle buildings of social infrastructure.

From the hypotheses for controlling and the responsibilities of the vacancy of the infrastructures lying idle and for it's handling through the owner one central question was developed: Is it possible to revitalize social infrastructures, even if there is no chance to get them back to their original use and a missing demand on the real estate market? To answer the question a research design was used, where the object of research (the social infrastructures) is shown in the context of the transformations which were going on in the region.

Over the working time of approx. two years (2009-2011) three interacting phases form the basis for knowing. These phases conduce to the fundamental discovery and maximal penetration of the object of research on the one hand, to implement gained knowledge and findings on site on the other hand. In phase one, the so called inventory, the characteristics of social infrastructures were analysed in the context of the special circumstances of the post-reunification transformation and the consequences of the demographic change which affects the former mining region. A characteristical performance report should be developed which has gained experience with sectoral adaption to the demographic change. Characteristics like demographic development, medical care, the handling with buildings of the church, the school development, the economical situation and the real estate market are the horizon of experience for the operationalization of possibilities of valorization. Valorization for these special real estate are always difficult because as it turned out, under shrinking circumstances with a market failure at the real estate market the "self-regulating forces" collapse.

The fructuous discussion for possible solutions beyond a subsidy system, for temporary uses or special economic areas comes to the conclusion that it is possible to control the vacancy but it's not done from the inside. The reason for that is, how was also shown at the area-wide survey for measuring the awareness of the problems of the real estate owner, basic quantitative and qualitative knowledge, strategies for revitalization and a management of vacancies and the sensibility for the problem are not existent. The necessity to regulative from the outside seems to be necessary because for urbanistic and architectural/ building culture reasons. Townscaping documents of a period get lost and quarters, in good order so far, perforate.

From the 80 identified objects in the two rural districts, schools, churches and parish houses have the highest rate of vacancy. Hospitals are less affected but are more difficult to refunction because of their size and their dominant position in the townscape.

Phase two shows chances and risks of conversions: the analysis and validation of the stock analyses the social infrastructures in the context of the demographic change.

15 case studies of conversion in the model region and 5 case studies of conversion outside the model region were researched to gain knowledge and reflect these processes.

By the qualitative research method pragmatic conclusions and comprehension for decisions and solution approaches were compiled. Together with expert-interviews and an extensive architectural-urbanistic database assisted analysis of 40 vacant social infrastructures unite in a guide. With the new instrument of a database analysis (which is an indicator-assisted cadaster of the vacancies) and the guide the result are two products. With that it is possible to transmit the findings from the research project to other rural districts which are affected by the demographic change. In phase three, the exploration of the research findings in an architecture workshop has shown, that the sensitization of the owner, the identification of investors (among other things per press-clipping and contacts in the research team) and the generation of ideas are more useful in a multi-day design process than the compromise of an auction on site.

It wasn't topic of the research to put the problem (social infrastructures which are lying idle) in a context of political-fiscal decisions or of regional policy and planning. For all that the question of the in principle effectivity and orientation/ direction of a school system planning on the Central Place Theory is to be asked. It seems to be clear that in the future the transportation costs for pupils will rise significantly. In equal measure it is worth discussing if the increasing number of social infrastructures in a modified model of a vertical respectively in units of space thickened special economic area can be a model which works where are no chances for revival. As an urbanistic and business development model it can bring chances to save special buildings from the impending downfall.