

Title

Activating the city centre of small cities through the interlinked application of successful models from major cities and rural regions, such as innovative management of vacant buildings, the installation of multipurpose buildings and the promotion of alternative housing for "Generation Plus".

Are our small cities being deserted for the lure of big cities and rural idylls?



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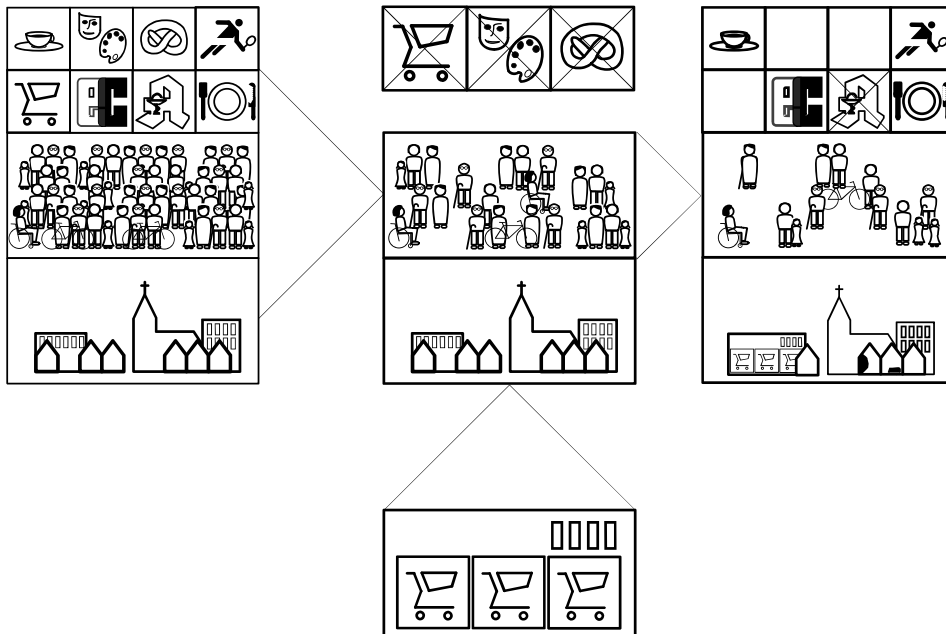
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Starting point

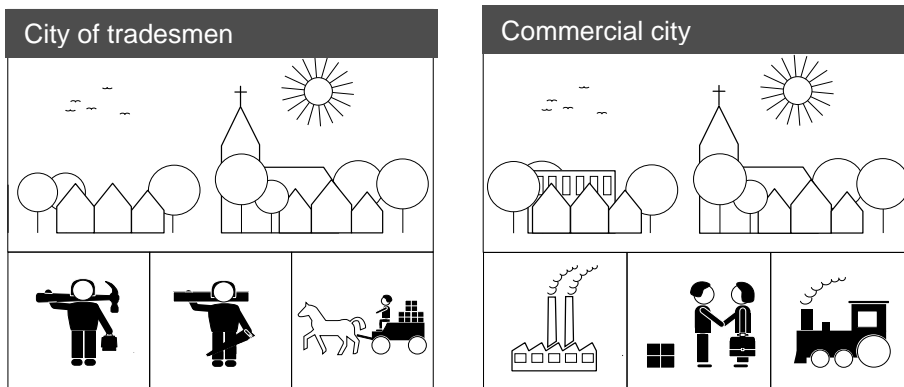
The effects of demographic and structural change have in the past been discussed in respect of shrinking major cities and the depopulation of rural regions. Now the focus is on small and medium-sized cities, even though the threat has not yet been considered in many places: shopping centres on the urban fringes are pulling purchasing power away. Suburbanisation and lower population density in city centres is magnifying this effect. Inner cities are becoming less attractive. Shops are closing, window displays remain empty, discount outlets are moving into city centres. The trading down effect is kicking in.



(Small) urban development due to demographic change?

Tenants from all generations no longer feel their needs are being met where they live, and no longer identify with their city. As a result, they are leaving. There are no funds for redevelopment. Houses stand empty. Residential streets fall into disrepair. Historical city centres, as birthplaces of the city and sites of identification, are deserted.

The aim of this paper is to stabilise and revitalise smaller cities, to permanently and sustainably prevent the desertion of small city centres, to put an end to depopulation and promote relocation to small city centres. 150 years after the last major structural change – from a city of tradesmen to a commercial city – a new direction must be conceived of for historic cities.



Small and medium-sized cities not only combine the advantages of both big cities and villages, but are increasingly battling with all of the disadvantages. Small cities in the catchment area of major cities are threatened with being downgraded to dormitory towns. In rural areas, small cities are not only in mutual competition as regional service centres, they are also trying to hold their ground against shopping centres and factory outlets on "greenfield" sites - instead of developing strategies to make use of the influx of new purchasing power in the region for their own city. A complete rethink of urban development is required, combining immediate measures that are easy and cheap to implement and long-term urban development concepts. Solutions lie in the installation of new types of housing and in the flexible, multifunctional use of existing vacant space.

Subject of the research project

In particular, the consideration of various cities and urban development concepts in the research section of the paper has proven that the inner city represents the most important area in small-city life. Despite the different areas of focus in the individual projects, the particular problems in the city centre are a special priority and their resolution determines the development process of the whole city.

In the selected “model cities” of Rochlitz in the state of Saxony and Sinzig in Rhineland-Palatinate, and in a generalised way in the last section of this publication, it will be shown that the interlinking and modified application of the resolution approaches outlined at the start to smaller cities, and in particular to their inner cities, reinforces their function as “service centres” in rural areas. Small cities can therefore stand their ground in competition with major cities, even from the current perspective.



If urban development is viewed as a dynamic process and applied accordingly, it is possible to react to the effects of demographic change. Events which often happened randomly in the history of small cities can today be put to deliberate use. Active management of vacant buildings, low-threshold activation of derelict land, simple interim uses etc. can be a modern way to create a structure for a small city as part of a joint process that promotes its identity while remaining flexible.

Even in the sensitive inner city areas, which both residents and visitors alike approach with high expectations, all of the possibilities of the urban development process must be exploited and where possible implemented promptly. For this reason, a creative combination of simple immediate measures and the phased implementation of long-term concepts is essential in the inner city. Process-driven urban development offers visual and substantial opportunities to make the desired positive image of a small city visible and tangible – conversely, the lack of an urban development policy is immediately obvious, in the worst case scenario not only to educated observers, but also to tourists!

In this paper, various components of the management of vacant buildings in the inner city will be examined, which can be sustainably implemented on the basis of the following important criteria:

- Creating and updating a map of vacant buildings in the inner city
- Maintaining a priority list of selected inner city buildings
- Developing action recommendations for selected inner city buildings

The targeted management of vacant buildings is the basis of and vital accompaniment to the process of stabilising and activating the centre of a small city.

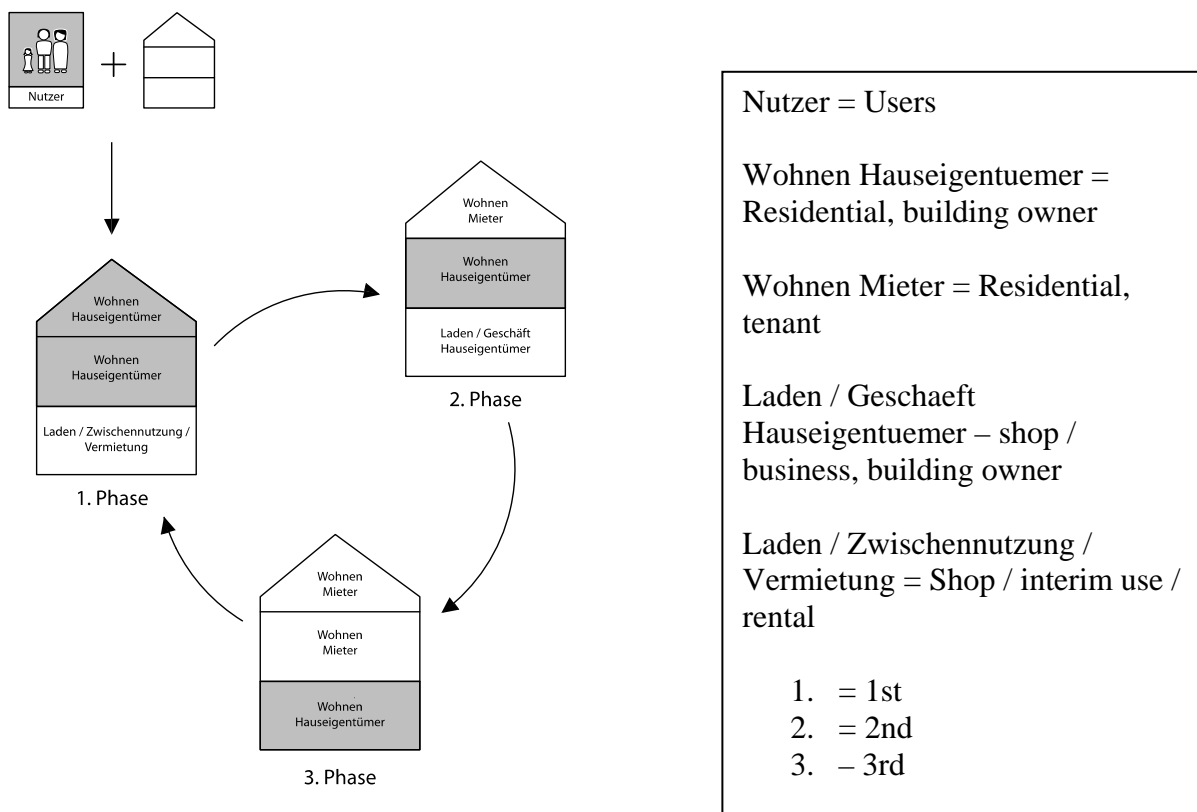
The modified concept of a multipurpose building (see www.multiples-haus.de), adapted for small cities, is also presented, in which the multifunctional and time-flexible use of rooms developed there is adapted to the criteria defined for small cities of

- change of use between residential-commercial-residential and
- change of use to start ups.

Small cities do not generally lack service providers, as is the case in rural areas. But they are threatened with desertion due to a lack of variety and the “trading down effect” caused by the creeping increase of discount outlets in the inner city.

But here, as in rural areas, the basic concept of multipurpose room use as "room sharing" can be an important commercial alternative for young companies.

The flexible and simple change of use between accommodation suitable for older people and small-city commerce on the lower and upper floors of inner city houses offers an additional opportunity to visually and substantially reduce and manage the stock of vacant buildings.



Three stages of life in one inner city house: family – generation 50 plus – generation 70 plus

This also gives an example of contemporary accommodation for Generation 50 Plus. In the results of the paper it can also be seen that the inner city is viewed by this generation as so safe and liveable that even traditional “living on the ground floor” is not rejected, as it generally is in big cities, and that this creates the opportunity to develop

- accommodation suitable for older people and
- managed accommodation

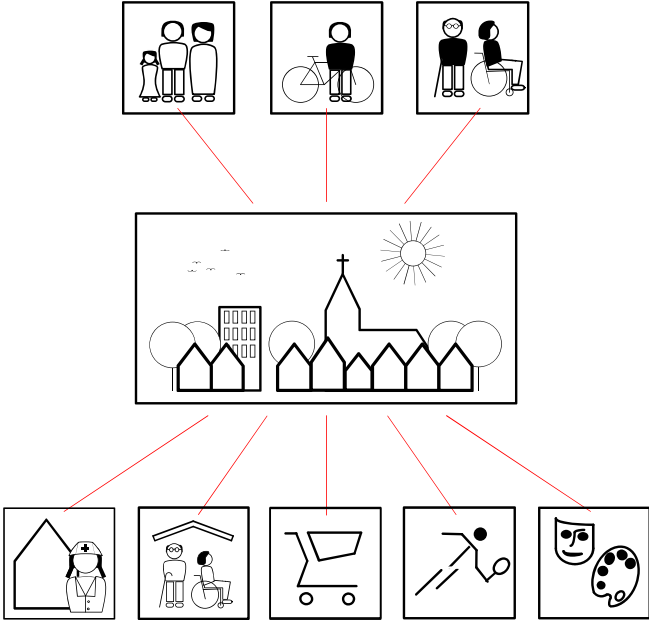
as is done in rural areas. These two important criteria for intergenerational, self-determined accommodation are also particularly cheap in classic small city houses with up to two storeys, and are very attractive to implement in former shops.

It is far more important for a small city to be a "city for citizens" than it is for a major city. Civic engagement can become one of the most important drivers of urban development here. It is therefore vital, particularly in small cities, that possible stakeholders among the citizens are identified, incentivised and supported – one of the most important tasks for the city administration.

Even when the close neighbourliness of a small city, its proximity to citizens and the particular small-city "openness" are not viewed solely in a positive light, and are even evaluated differently from region to region, close and above all active cooperation between the city administration and citizens is seen as advisable and indispensable.

The identification of these active and potential "citymakers" can differ greatly from region to region. Generally speaking, it is particularly important in a small city to recognise and bring them together. In this regard, focusing on just one central goal and theme, such as the joint development of the inner city, as well as regular and open "round table" discussions can be particularly conducive to creating permanently successful cooperation between citizens and the city administration. This communication should be led by just one central contact from the city administration, who is basically the "area manager" of the inner city and is always available as a coordinator and mediator between the active citizens and the decision makers in the administration. Straightforward communication is an important prerequisite for sustained and enthusiastic engagement by citizens.

Two other important prerequisites are outwardly visible and real openness and tolerance – characteristics that are often judged to be present in major cities and absent from smaller ones. If a small city can successfully throw off the classic image of the small city as narrow-minded and stuffy, only then will it become in any way attractive to younger generations - regardless of whether they are looking for a cheap principal residence, an idyllic second home from which to commute or a relaxing place to live out their dream of independence. The willingness to engage on behalf of their chosen location by these newcomers will be all the greater if they are included right from the start in the urban community and development and are made to feel, like every other citizen of the city, that their vision of the small city is being heard, discussed and supported.

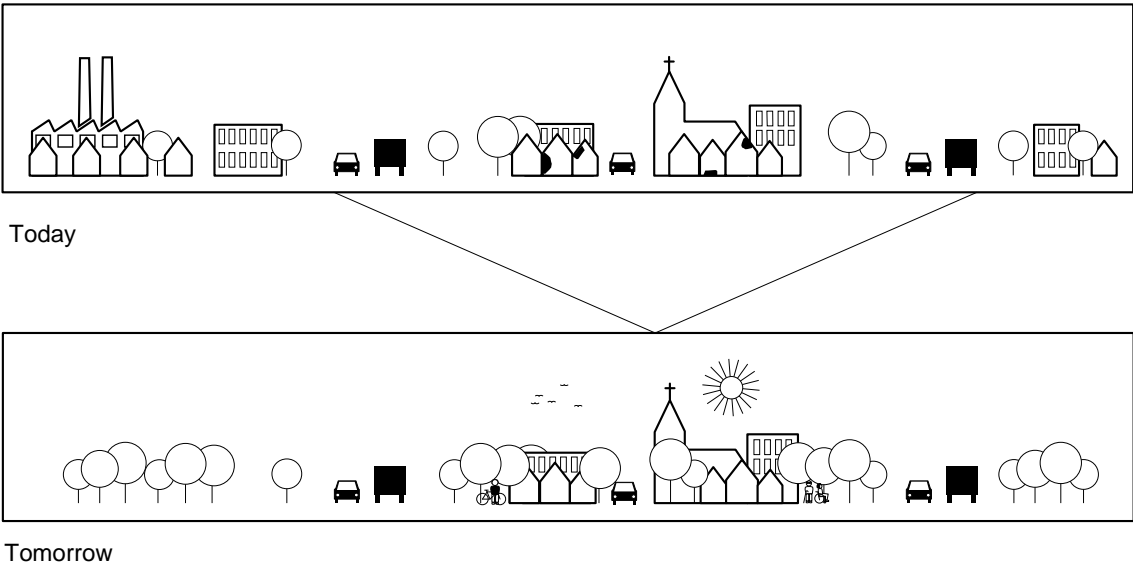


The various possibilities for use and participation set out and detailed in this paper offer both temporary and long-term approaches for a sustainably liveable and multifaceted small city, which remains identifiable, showcases its history while also projecting a modern urban side - small, but perfectly formed!

Conclusion and recommended action: The small city masterplan

For all the regional and historical differences between small cities, an “inner city masterplan” can still be created, which essentially is a **small city masterplan**.

Because an important fact remains that the historical centre is always the "heart" and flagship of the small city. This is where the city has the greatest opportunity to put itself on show. And that is precisely why each visitor here will visualise the small city in their own very personal way, one that will not always be as positive as the city administration and perhaps the city residents believe, when viewed subjectively and from the outside. The investigations have led to the recognition that the inner city must always be viewed in the context of the entire small city, and that the effect of decisions taken outside of the inner city can also be felt there.



The special features of each small city are contained in its size, location, history, neighbourliness and citizens. All of these can be turned to its advantage, even if some are not initially viewed as ideal or even appear to be disadvantages.

The small city masterplan should link urban regional development with targeted economic development, which should be accompanied right from the start by a creative urban marketing strategy involving all active citizens.