Planning for Slow Growth and Decline in Mid-Sized U.S. Cities

ALEX MCKEAG
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Abstract

While many major cities in the United States are once again gaining population, growing their economies, and attracting talent, many small and mid-sized cities are in decline. The reasons for this growing disparity are multi-faceted.

A growing body of research has been exploring planning challenges in declining cities and towns. This body of research—often called “shrinking cities” and “urban shrinkage” research—is premised on the belief that many declining places will continue to shed population, jobs, and industries, and planning smartly for this decline is the only sensible path forward. So far, research in the U.S. has focused primarily on Northeast and Midwest cities where population and industrial decline has been the most severe. Less scholarship has studied places that have declined more slowly and more recently.

This thesis examines the current trends impacting the decline of mid-sized cities in the Midwestern United States, focusing on four cities in the State of Illinois. It also explores whether these cities are ready to consider the possibility that population decline is not temporary and change their planning strategies accordingly. Finally, this thesis will introduce an emerging paradigm in contemporary urban planning practice that fuses growth and decline strategies, to prepare mid-sized cities for an uncertain demographic and economic future.

Keywords: shrinking cities, urban shrinkage, urban decline, Illinois, ordinary cities, Midwest, shrinkage, path dependency, urban planning
Abstrakt

Samtidigt som många av USA:s storstäders befolkning återigen har börjat öka i befolkningsstorlek, stärka sina ekonomier och dra till sig talangfulla individer, så genomgår många små och mellanstora städer ett allmänt förfall. Anledningarna för detta ökande gap är komplexa.

Ett växande forskningsintresse har riktats mot utmaningar som stadsplanerare står inför i förfallande städer. Detta diskuteras ofta i termer av ‘krympande städer’ och baseras på en uppfattning av att många förfallande platser kommer att fortsätta förlora befolkning, jobbmöjligheter och industrier, och att planering för ett sådant förfall är den enda rimliga vägen framåt. I USA har forskningen än så länge mest fokuserat på städer i de nordöstra och mellanvästra delarna av landet, där nedgångar i industrin och tillhörande befolkning minskningar har varit extrema. Mindre fokus har lagts på platser som har genomgått långsammare nedgångar och under senare år.

Denna studie utforskar de nuvarande trender som bidrar till förfallet av mellanstora städer i Mellanvästern USA, med fokus på fyra städer i delstaten Illinois. Studien undersöker även om dessa städer är redo att överväga möjligheten att befolkningsminskningarna inte är tillfälliga, och justera deras planeringsstrategier i linje med denna möjlighet. Slutfilen introducerar studien en framväxande paradigim inom nutida stadsplanering som förenar strategier för både tillväxt och nedgång, i syfte att förbereda mellanstora städer för en oklar demografisk och ekonomisk framtid.

Nyckelord: krympande städer, urbant förfall, Illinois, mellanvästra USA, krympning, vägberoende, stadsplanering
1 Introduction & Research Focus

1.1 Overview

Urban decline in the United States happened because of myriad forces, most powerfully deindustrialization, suburbanization, and urban disinvestment. Simultaneously, global economic and technological shifts have allowed people, companies, and capital to become less connected to a specific place in time (Amin, 2004). A handful of select regions have emerged as financial, technological, and creative hubs, attracting jobs, talent, and people from around the globe (Hartt, 2018). However, many more cities in the industrialized west have shed people and jobs, leaving behind a landscape of vacant factories, homes, and businesses. Many of these cities have also lost population to their suburban periphery and other major urban centers—and failed to get them back (Beauregard, 2009).

More direly, these same cities have suffered a decade or more of financial stress. In the wake of the economic crash of 2008-2009, cities faced severe budget shortfalls (Muro and Hoene, 2009). The financial crisis hit states as well, many responded by significantly cutting local assistance for public K–12 and higher education, disability services, elderly care, and health services (Peck, 2012), making it more difficult than ever for cities to address the crisis of urban decline. Neither population loss nor financial stress has abated in many cities. Research suggests that population loss in many communities today is structural, a permanent fixture of global capital flows and consumption (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, and Cunningham-Sabot, 2012; Wiechmann, 2008).

Given this new context of uncertainty, austerity, and decline, how a city responds to these challenges is more crucial than ever. Despite a growing body of evidence on shrinking cities, it is unclear to planners and policymakers how best to address the myriad side effects of urban decline and plan for the future (Haase, 2013; Schilling and Logan, 2008).

1.2 Urban Decline & Shrinking Cities Research

Shrinking cities research started with the German Federal Cultural Foundation who, in 2002, funded the "Shrinking Cities" project. This project "included interventions in the former East Germany, international investigations, exhibitions, and working papers." Soon after, UC Berkeley established the Shrinking Cities International Scholars Group. The group held an international conference which focused on shrinking cities and resulted in the Shrinking Cities International Research Network (SCiRN), a transnational group of scholars collaborating on shrinking cities research. Other university-led initiatives followed, including the Shrinking Cities Institute by Kent State and Cleveland State, which has a geographical focus on the state of Ohio, arguably the epicenter of urban population loss in the U.S. (Beauregard, 2009, p.516). Much scholarship has stemmed from these early initiatives and now includes hundreds of academic papers, books, and community-led projects (Hollander, 2018).

Researchers have tried to pinpoint the causes of urban shrinkage in various socio-political contexts. Much research has examined post-industrial German cities (Hollander et al., 2009). In Germany, falling birth rates and "the effects of the German reunification" triggered shrinkage
In Japan, urban decline and low fertility rates, along with aging populations and migration from rural to urban places, have been fingered as primary causes. The demographic shifts have touched off debates about "disintegrating local identities and social ties" (Großmann et al., 2013, p.222; Matanle and Soto, 2010). In the United Kingdom, decades of industrial closures and housing abandonment in the post-industrial economic system has given rise to more recent debates about urban regeneration (Sykes and Roberts, 2000). In the United States, research tends to focus on the impacts of deindustrialization on cities in the Midwest and Northeast. However, work by Beauregard (2009), Audirac (2009), Hollander (2011) and many others reveals just how dispersed urban shrinkage is across the country.

1.3 Gaps in Existing Literature

Numerous case studies of specific cities in the U.S., Europe, Japan, and elsewhere have helped researchers understand the local impacts of dwindling populations. Comprehensive cross-cutting studies have had a more limited impact. Together, academic research has not amounted to “a systematic body of research” on shrinking cities (Haase et al., 2017, p.97). Recently published books and academic papers have crafted a research agenda for expanding the study of shrinking places and filling this research gap (see Hollander, 2018, A Research Agenda for Shrinking Cities and Großmann et al., 2013, Shrinking cities: Notes for the further research agenda). There have been additional appeals for more case studies (Weaver et al., 2017) and broader perspectives on cities and their responses to shrinkage. All of this is in an attempt to uncover “blind spots by contrasting experiences” and “analyse the interplay between policy and resources” (Grossman et al., 2013).

Moreover, severity, or the magnitude of population loss, is used most often to describe urban decline (Beauregard, 2009). Detroit, Youngstown, Cleveland, Buffalo, and many other so-called Rust Belt cities in the United States have dominated the shrinking cities discourse because they have sustained the most severe population and job losses (Dewar et al., 2013; Hartt, 2018; Mallach, 2012). While their histories are both tragic and cautionary, they are far from the only kinds of deterioration and instability found across the U.S. For example, Hollander’s (2017) book An Ordinary City tells the story of New Bedford, Massachusetts, a mid-sized Northeast city that has experience bouts of both rapid growth and slow decline, but today is neither fulling rebounding nor declining rapidly.

Chicago—the Midwest’s largest city—is the most-often studied city in the State of Illinois. Smaller cities in Illinois are infrequently included in shrinking cities research and never in detail, possibly because their population and job losses have been less severe than those in other states (Renn, 2019). However, their growth trajectories are surprisingly common. Hollander et al. (2009) put it succinctly: “Some cities grow a lot, others shrink a lot, but the vast bulk of them fall somewhere between fast growth and fast shrinkage. They grow slowly, shrink slowly, remain reliably stable, or combine these patterns over time” (p.27).

There is evidence to suggest that several Illinois cities are losing population at historical levels for the state (Divounguy et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a need to update the research on the nature of urban decline in Illinois cities, considering that it likely more closely matches the trajectory of other cities in the United States.
1.4 Research Questions

Shrinking cities researchers have expressed a need for more case studies and broader perspectives that may help explain the complexity of urban shrinkage (Großmann et al., 2013; Hollander, 2018; Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, and Cunningham-Sabot, 2012). Understanding approaches “tried outside the classic deindustrializing cities, their rationale, their effects” could be useful to policymakers and practitioners in places experiencing the same trends (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, and Cunningham-Sabot, 2012, p.222).

It follows that places which do not fit the typical delineation of “shrinking” can still supply useful insights about the complexity of urban shrinkage. Using four mid-sized cities in the State of Illinois, this research seeks to add to the growing body of shrinking cities research by answering the following three questions: 1) Are these cities shrinking and if so, to what extent? 2) What are the implications of their shrinking? 3) What is the current planning discourse around population decline and shrinking in each city?
2 Theoretical Framework & Key Concepts

The expanding literature on shrinking cities and theories on the economic restructuring of the post-industrial city inform this thesis.

2.1 Urban Decline & Shrinkage

Shrinkage, or shrinking cities, is a relatively new term. No consensus on meaning has emerged. Weaver et al. (2017) leave the definition broad by interpreting shrinkage “to reflect sustained, downward, quantitative adjustments to the population of a given geographic community” (p.3). A decline “in the size of the economy and built environment of the depopulating community” accompanies population loss (ibid). According to Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, and Cunningham-Sabot (2012) shrinkage is identified by “an urban area—a city, part of a city, an entire metropolitan area or a town—that has experienced population loss, economic downturn, employment decline and social problems as symptoms of a structural crisis” (p.214).

Applied to a city, researchers tend to be more specific. A shrinking city has been described as “a densely populated urban area with a minimum population of 10,000 residents that has faced population losses in large parts for more than two years and is undergoing economic transformations with some symptoms of a structural crisis” (Hollander et al., 2009, p.6). Schilling and Logan (2008) identify shrinking cities as “older industrial cities…with significant and sustained population loss (25% or greater over the past 40 years) and increasing levels of vacant and abandoned properties, including blighted residential, commercial, and industrial buildings” (p.452). Others propose a threshold of 30% over four decades (Hollander, 2011; Weaver et al., 2017).

Urban shrinkage and decline are complementary but distinct terms. Urban decline is used to speak generally about the economic and demographic losses stemming from an era of deindustrialization. Urban shrinkage has a more specific use. It is used “to stress the fact that this phenomenon is a multidimensional process with multidimensional effects and having economic, demographic, geographic, social and physical dimensions that not only continue to evolve as a result of new global and local realities” as well provide a framework for a research agenda on the phenomenon (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, and Cunningham-Sabot, 2012, p.214).

Academics attest that the term “shrinkage” is an improvement over “decline” as it is more specific to the structural trends that have led to sustained population losses. The term has garnered global acceptance among academics (Haase, 2017), though it is still widely regarded as “politically unpalatable” (Hollander et al., 2009, p.21). That is to say, the public acknowledgment of population shrinkage is a political risk, in part, because it “demands a fundamental change in a community’s self-perception, its practice of land use regulation, its use of public funds, and its provision of public services” that challenges current growth models (Mallach, 2012, p.108).
2.1.1 The Causes of Decline

The causes of urban decline are multifaceted and global (Beauregard, 2009; Hollander et al., 2018). In the United States, deindustrialization, suburbanization, and demographic change are often cited as the primary factors of urban decline (Großmann et al. 2013; Morrill, 2014). All three have hit the Midwestern United States particularly hard (Beauregard, 2006).

Deindustrialization is the “substantial, downward, quantitative adjustment to the total stock of employers and employees engaged in the production of manufactured goods” (Weaver et al., 2017, p.57). When manufacturers close down, there is a concomitant outflow of people (Weaver et al., 2017). Suburbanization “involves the outward, horizontal expansion of builtup land relative to a central city” (Weaver et al., 2017, p.58). Many U.S. cities have seen a decline in the central city with simultaneous healthy activity and growth in the suburbs, something known as the “doughnut effect” (Haase, 2013, p.259). The process of suburbanization lowers population densities in central cities by attracting wealthy and middle-class people to unincorporated lands in the city’s periphery or otherwise new “autonomous local governments” (Kantor, 2010, p.5).

This migration from the central city to places of attractive size, laws, and amenities is known as the Tiebout hypothesis (Tiebout, 1956; Weaver et al., 2017).

Finally, shifting demographics—via migration and natural processes such as deaths, births, and natural disasters—exacerbate urban decline (Weaver et al., 2017, p.58). Decreasing birthrates in the developed world since the 1950s, coupled with suburbanization, has contributed to a decline in urban populations (Martinez-Fernandez, Naoko, Noya, and Weyman, 2012; Oswalt, 2005).

In the U.S., racial tensions and perceptions of crime and poverty have played a role in demonizing central cities. Middle-income whites began avoiding cities at the turn of the century. High crime rates and poor public education performance pushed affluent households into residential enclaves further from the city center and into better school districts (Beauregard, 2009; Downs, 1997). Moreover, both “American antipathy for redistributive policies toward the poor and the lack of affordable housing abetted by municipal building regulations” have been identified as contributing factors to urban decline (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, and Cunningham-Sabot, 2012, p.216).

2.1.2 Impacts of Shrinking

Shrinking populations pose several problems for cities: lower sales tax revenue (Downs, 1997), lower property tax revenue (Muro and Hoene, 2009), increase in abandoned homes and buildings (Dewar and Manning Thomas, 2013), along with many others. Shrinking cities also tend to have high elderly populations, which translates into a higher demand for public services with fewer people to pay for them (Haase, 2013). Shrinkage works as a feedback loop, wherein fewer employment opportunities increases the out-migration of young people (Lima and Eischeid, 2017). This exodus of young people means an outflow of “skills, knowledge and innovation” to more economically robust places (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, and Cunningham-Sabot,
This loss of talent lowers local economic activity and dampens a city’s ability to be resilient to future economic shocks (Kodrzycki and Muñoz, 2014).

Urban shrinkage is more than just the loss of population and jobs. Shrinkage manifests physically in cities in multiple ways. The most visible signs are derelict and abandoned homes, empty lots, and vacant factories and commercial spaces (Beauregard, 2009). Vacant land, defined broadly, is “all land that is unused or abandoned for the longer term, including raw dirt, spontaneous vegetation and emergent ecologies, land with recently razed buildings, perimeter agricultural land fallen out of cultivation, brownfields and other contaminated sites, or land that supports long-term, abandoned derelict structures” (Németh and Langhorst, 2014, p.144).

As populations decline, the number of homes outpaces demand. Some sit empty and deteriorate. Owners defer maintenance or abandoned properties altogether as values sink and it no longer makes financial sense to invest in them (Mallach, 2014a, p.129). The physical environment of the city declines more slowly than the population because populations are transient, but housing is a durable good—it cannot be easily moved (Glaeser and Gyourko, 2005). The city left with more homes than people to fill them.

Abandoned buildings often succumb to fire, elements, or forced teardown. The vacant land that replaces them is often unattractive, collecting trash, or becoming unlicensed dumping grounds for waste, lowering the quality of urban life (Rybczynski and Linneman, 1999). The removal of buildings in shrinking cities leads to urban “perforation,” or a patchwork of vacant land interspersed with standing buildings (Haase et al., 2007). The “dissolution of the street or block structure” occurs when a critical mass of vacant lots replace enough buildings (Haase, 2013, p.259). As building abandonment reaches this critical mass, “the neighborhood loses the collective benefit of more concentrated housing, and each resident’s or landlord’s incentive to keep investing in his or her property decreases” (Ryan, 2012, p.349). This process of housing abandonment creates a feedback loop known as “cumulative causation” (Hospers, 2014, initially proposed by Myrdal, 1957), wherein abandonment begets abandonment, blight begets blight. This explains why many urban strategies for arresting decline focus on stopping buildings from falling into disrepair in the first place and when they do, to remove them as quickly as possible.

Shrinkage also impacts infrastructure. An infrastructure system of streets, sewer, and water systems built initially for a larger population remains long after residents move away, saddling fewer residents with the cost to maintain it (Schiller, 2007). Municipal budgetary crises following the 2009-2009 economic crisis led to layoffs and budget reductions in many cities (Muro and Hoene, 2009). Alarmingly, evidence suggests that cycles of budget cuts and financial austerity “is becoming a new urban condition in many parts of the USA”—meaning, municipal fiscal crises are systemic (Peck, 2012, p.651). Years of budgets cuts reduce the capacity of city departments (e.g., planning) and weaken city leadership (Ryan, 2012, p.366). This is doubly true in shrinking cities, where conditions cause a negative feedback loop of declining city revenue. Cities experiencing depopulation lose property tax value from depreciating home values and an increase in abandoned, non-tax-paying properties. Operating budgets are stressed, and there is less money to maintain infrastructure, so it falls into disrepair (Weaver et al., 2017, p.34).
2.2 Responses to Urban Decline & Shrinkage

Oswalt (2005, 2006) *Shrinking Cities: Volume 1 International Research* and *Volume 2: Interventions* capture the dynamic causes and reactions to urban shrinkage around the world. These books became foundational tomes of shrinking cities research. Numerous researchers since (see Hollander and Cahill, 2011; Hollander, 2018) have used Oswalt’s work to frame, understand, and evaluate responses to urban shrinkage and give shape to urban shrinkage theory. Oswalt (2006) introduces the following four terms to categorize responses to urban shrinkage: deconstructing, reevaluating, reorganizing, and imagining.

Deconstructing refers to the changing of the physical environment by removing built structures or rightsizing strategies that address surplus infrastructure and buildings (Hollander and Cahill, 2011, p.254). Reevaluating is often considered a “reinterpretation” of the built environment and can be achieved by physically altering it—and thus can overlap with deconstructing strategies—or reconsidering its very nature. For example, repurposing vacant lots for urban agriculture or green infrastructure. The reuse of underperforming land for new or temporary uses falls on a spectrum of zero to a lot of physical alteration (Hollander and Cahill, 2011, p.255).

Reorganizing strategies focus “on the changes that can be made to the organization and functioning of municipal government to more effectively address the issues faced by shrinking cities and regions” such as changes to codes and zoning or the consolidation of city departments in order to better address the symptoms of shrinking (Hollander and Cahill, 2011, p.255). Finally, imagining focuses on a place’s image and vision, crafting a new identity that is wholly different from the negative image communicated by urban decline. This new image may or may not explicitly relate to new industries, such as tourism or technology. These new images are often influenced by “collective symbolism found in the region’s history and culture” (Hollander and Cahill, 2011, p.255).

Weaver et al. (2017) added subcategories to Oswalt’s four terms, further clarifying the framework. They include:

1. Deconstructing
   a. Demolition
   b. Deconstruction
   c. Consolidation
2. Reevaluating
   a. Down-zoning
   b. De-densification
3. Reorganizing
   a. Place-based palliative planning interventions
   b. Building social capital
   c. Alternative ownership models
   d. Polycentric governance
4. Imagining (p.131-143)
Addressing the urban shrinkage in the European context, Hospers (2014) suggests four types of policy responses to shrinkage: 1) trivializing shrinkage, 2) countering shrinkage, 3) accepting shrinkage and 4) utilizing shrinkage. Trivializing shrinkage is the policy of ignoring the problem, doing nothing to change actions or behaviors—in other words, maintaining the status quo (p.1511). Countering shrinkage is defensive and “includes all policy measures aimed at fostering urban growth, including building new residential areas and landmarks as well as place marketing” (p.1512). There is optimism that the city can find a path to growth again because population loss is considered a temporary phenomenon.

Accepting shrinkage refers to taking a policy position of accepting the city’s new reality of a shrunken population and pursuing “policies to mitigate the negative effects” of shrinkage (Hospers, 2014, p.1513). The city no longer pursues growth strategies and instead attempts to manage shrinkage and stabilize losses. Finally, utilizing shrinkage “starts from a positive view on shrinking cities and suggests to take advantage of it,” typically with future-oriented approaches that take advantage of existing local assets and foster entrepreneurship (Hospers, 2014, p.1514). Cities may slide between these responses as they navigate the complex process of urban shrinkage.

### 2.2.1 Smart Decline & Smart Shrinkage

Urban decline discourse in the U.S. implies that population figures are heading in one direction: downward. Urban shrinkage scholarship has challenged this narrative with examples of places that have arrested or reversed their declines, asserting that shrinkage “usually replaces former phases of growth and might be followed by new growth again” (Haase et al., 2017, p.95).

An emerging term, “smart shrinkage” (or “smart decline”) focuses on shrinking the physical footprint of place and adopting social patterns that improve the quality of life for residents. Strategies vary, but the changes incurred “can consist of decreased levels of traditional investments, paired with increased investments in nontraditional land uses such as urban farming, recreation, public art and environmental remediation” (Hollander et al., 2017, p.2).

This term parallels “smart growth” which—along with complimentary movements of sustainable development and New Urbanism—has become a “part of a planning philosophy that has dominated much of planning practice and scholarship” since the 1990s (Talen and Knaap, 2003, p.346). Smart growth is characterized by “compact development, mixed use, accessibility, and public transit” and finds a “natural alliance with a number of interrelated movements: historic preservation, downtown redevelopment, environmentalism, visual quality, public transit, bicycling, and pedestrianism” (ibid). Many smart growth principles indirectly address urban decline, such as promoting infill on underutilized land and land conservation (ibid). In fact, the vast tracts of vacant land in severely shrinking cities presents an enormous opportunity for smart growth strategies such as infill and brownfield redevelopment (Németh and Langhorst, 2014). However, smart growth fails to address the pressing issue of “planning for less” in a shrinking city, which some have claimed “demands its own distinct approach” (Popper and Popper, 2012, p.23).
“Rightsizing” is a specific method of “smart shrinkage.” It is used, along with “downsizing” (Haase et al., 2017), to mean “a city’s physical fabric is adjusted to accommodate the needs of the current and expected population” (Bertron, 2013, p.24). Rightsizing typically applies to housing and infrastructure, intervening to align the number of available housing units with a dramatically smaller population as well as to reduce hard infrastructure such as water lines, electricity, and streets to match the scale as well (Ryan, 2012).

Rightsizing raises social equity concerns because low-income neighborhoods house the majority of vacant properties (Schilling and Logan, 2008, p.435). Rightsizing also raises questions of viability. It is exceedingly tricky to decommission water, electrical, and transportation infrastructure. Moreover, decommissioning is not a priority to cities for several reasons, including the fear that removing capacity could jeopardize future growth (Hoornbeek and Schwartz, 2009).

Smart shrinkage and rightsizing approaches reframe shrinkage as an opportunity. Harnessed well, strategies devoted to reframing shrinkage can bring about “a more balanced relationship” between “social and built subsystems (Weaver et al., 2017, p.129). Once dense cities can reuse vacant land for open spaces, which is good for people who want more nature in the city (Ryan, 2012). Planners can use shrinkages as “a chance to re-envision cities and to explore nontraditional approaches to the growth at a time when cities desperately need them” (Hollander et al., 2009, p.5).

### 2.3 Economic Restructuring of the Post-Industrial City

Beginning the mid-20th Century, cities in Western democracies experienced severe deindustrialization and a complete restructuring of their economies. Local and national economies connected globally in new ways. Capital flows become global, so banks and lenders concentrated in a handful of large cities around the globe. Large proportions of industrial production redistributed geographically, shifting from high-wage developed countries to low-wage developing ones. Cities lost factories and jobs. This reshaping of global capitalism increased the importance of a few select cities while diminishing the role of many more (Hartt, 2018). The resultant shifts in employment “left cities with significant challenges, including strained public-sector budgets, high unemployment, abandoned buildings, and residents with limited access to employment opportunities” (Sassen, 1990, p.463).

Urban restructuring is synonymous with a precipitous decline in manufacturing output in the Midwestern and northeastern United States, in a swath of large and small manufacturing towns often referred to as the Rust Belt. This decline in manufacturing tracked with an increase in service industry jobs. Some loss in the manufacturing sector was offset by “low-wage, low-skill jobs and high-level professional jobs in service industries” (Sassen, 1990, p.467).

Famed economist Joseph Schumpeter (1942) suggested urban decline and poverty were symptoms of capitalism. Calling it “creative destruction,” he described a process by which new technologies appear in the market, are widely disseminated, and then disappear (or are destroyed) by the rise of new technologies in a cyclical process. To Schumpeter, “The fundamental impulse that sets and keeps the capitalist engine in motion comes from the new
consumers, goods, the new methods of production or transportation, the new markets, the new forms of industrial organization that capitalist enterprise creates” (Schumpeter, 1942, p.82-83). Creative destruction has spatial implications—the capitalist quest for continued renewal values the replacement of the old with the new. Thus, capitalism made it inevitable that newer, better versions of homes, factories, and offices supplanted older versions, which are found in various states of decay today. That is the nature of capitalism (Weber, 2002, p.522).

Urban theorist Jane Jacobs (1969) saw the drivers of urban economies and decline somewhat differently. To Jacobs, cities were creative engines. She asserted that diverse economic activities would create knowledge spillovers that, along with a spatial land use pattern that supported intermingling such as walkable, diverse neighborhoods, would generate new ideas and businesses, ensuring a dynamic, resilient economy. She cautioned against the over-concentration of a single industry because changes to the said industry would cause acute economic problems, and thus decline, for the host city. For example, she maligned Detroit’s concentration of the automobile industry, which she understood to be a significant cause of the cities’ decline. To Jacobs, cities hoping to reverse their shrinking and regrowth their economies should focus on supporting local businesses and diverse economic activities, not concentrate on one industry or wait to land a large out-of-town business (Jacobs, 1969).

A classic human ecology view of neighborhood decline asserts that “waves” of low-income (at the time, immigrants from Europe or rural America) move into successive zones, pushing the endogenous wealthier populations further and further away to different zones out in the periphery (Burgess, 1925). In many U.S. neighborhoods, this meant “massive racial transitions from white to black populations,” and concentrated pockets of poverty, disinvestment, and insecurity (Audirac, 2009, p.71).

Recent analysis on the state of U.S. cities provides a more nuanced picture on the state of urban America. Mallach (2015) explains how growth and decline often happen in tandem in a city. To him, there has been an uncoupling of the “economic city” and the “demographic city.” Today, reinvestment and growth in population and jobs happen almost exclusively in the core of medium and large cities as well as a few of their select amenity-rich neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the majority of neighborhoods in these same cities trend toward decline and concentrated poverty (Mallach, 2015). Moreover, decline itself, once considered an exclusively urban ailment, is found increasingly outside of the region’s core city (Weaver et al., 2017, p.95). Decline is no longer confined to the former manufacturing centers of the Midwest and Northeast but has spread to the South and Southwestern United States (Audirac, 2009; Beauregard, 2009; Pallagst, 2009).

### 2.3.1 Pro-Growth Paradigm

Writing in 1975, sociologist Herbert Gans wrote:

…cities, like people, are often reluctant to face the fact that growth has ended, and are sometimes even unable, for good political reasons, to admit it. Indeed, planning seems to play an important function in this process, for much of contemporary planning is still based on the promise of future growth, even in cities which long ago stopped growing,
and perhaps planning is one method by which cities-and city leaders-avoid dealing with the somber realities of their futures. (Gans, 1975, p.306).

Here, Gans was reflecting on Cleveland, Ohio, a city where urban decline was highly visible, shocking, and uncharted. His general point is simple—the common belief among planners and politicians is that cities are supposed to grow, and when they stop growing, no one is clear what to do. Thus, city leadership continues with pro-growth strategies.

Around the same time of Gans’ writing, political economist David Harvey charted a rise in cities’ employing entrepreneurial urban strategies, precipitated by a reduction in federal tax dollars flowing into cities, beginning in the 1970s (Harvey, 1989). Entrepreneurial urban strategies are strategies whereby cities try to improve their “competitive position” through “spatial division on consumption” (p.9) and are predicated on a zero-sum competition between regions vying for limited economic development. Cities shift focus from local economic projects like housing and education toward promoting and enhancing characteristics of “place” to make cities appear to be attractive places to consume. This new focus often manifests as various large developments, such as new civic centers, arenas, and cultural institution meant to boost image and tourism. It also leads to a massive increase in public-private partnerships (Harvey, 1989).

To Harvey, this kind of consumptive growth and development privileges affluent people and corporations, essentially amounting to a “subsidy” to “stay in town at the expense of local collective consumption for the working class and poor” (Harvey, 1989, p.12). Political economist Harvey Molotch claimed that in the American context, leaders viewed growth as the very “essence” of a city. The primary indicator of growth is a rising population (Molotch, 1976). Because “developmental resources” are scarce, cities—especially those in the same region—“compete with one another to gain the preconditions of growth” (p.312). Growth this acts the motivator behind decisions amongst a political elite and how they order local priorities. In this sense, a city acts as a “growth machine” in which population decline poses an existential threat. Unsurprisingly, leaders in shrinking cities today still promote economic and population growth agendas that aim to attract large private employers, using boosterism terms to put a positive spin on the growth potential of their city and outcompete rival regions (Leo and Anderson, 2006; Weaver et al., 2017).

There are several reasons for this persistent pursuit of growth. For one, acknowledging shrinkage is "political act fraught with risk" that challenges public perceptions (Mallach, 2012, p.108). Secondly, the strategies and solutions employed by planners and politicians are "honored achieve economic growth" (Schlappa and Neill, 2016, p.197-198). Planning in the U.S. is dominated by a pro-growth planning paradigm that labels growing places as successful and desirable. In this paradigm, shrinkage and decline are perceived negatively and stigmatized. In severe cases, this negative perception and diminished self-worth can lead to a sense of helplessness amongst city leaders and residents, reinforcing the negativity from within (Kantor, 2010; Leo and Anderson, 2006; Weaver et al., 2017).

Finally, the pro-growth paradigm persists, in part, because cities lack the tools and resources to address decline (Dewar et al., 2013; Schlappa and Neill, 2016, p.197-198). The persistent presumption is that the role of planning is to manage growth (Hartt, 2018, p.2947). Much as
Gans was asking of Cleveland in 1975, most shrinking cities in the U.S. are still figuring how to respond to shrinkage.

**2.3.2 Path Dependency**

Another potent explanation for the persistence of the pro-growth model is path dependency. Path dependency asserts actions, decisions, and trends that happened historically constrain today’s behaviors and decisions (Page, 2006, p.87-88). Mallach (2014b) suggests that path dependency can be especially influential in formerly industrial cities of the Midwest and the Northeast United States. He claims that “behaviors and attitudes that were formed in the years of these cities’ industrial strength continued to dominate for decades afterward, during which time it was not only impossible to act on the basis of the obvious changes that were taking place to the cities’ fabric but all but impossible even to discuss them in a rational fashion” (p.181-182).

Therefore, past periods of economic and population growth inform the pro-growth strategies employed by city leaders today, so much so that it is challenging for leaders to accept that urban shrinkage is their new economic and demographic trajectory (Page, 2006). Path dependency can work the opposite way, too—leadership in places with sustained decline may, after a time of trying to mitigate urban decline, only employ strategies that continue to mitigate and therefore not see a path toward future growth (Mallach, 2014b).
3 Description & Methods

This section describes the methods of analysis used to answer the three primary research questions, as well as explains the selection process for the four case study cities.

3.1 Selected Cities

This study analyzes the growth trajectories of four mid-sized cities in the State of Illinois. The selected cities are Decatur, Peoria, Rockford, and Springfield. All four cities meet the criteria of “ordinary” set out in Hollander’s (2018) typicality analysis (see Appendix A, Hollander, 2018). “Ordinariness” is determined by meeting housing, demographic, and population size criteria. In total, 144 cities across the United States meet these criteria according to Hollander’s analysis.

This study focuses on Illinois cities because they are under-represented in existing shrinking cities research. Together, these four cities represent a spectrum of population change over time that makes them useful for a comparison study. Importantly, each city is far enough from the City of Chicago and each other to remain “the primary urban center of its metropolitan area” (Kodrzycki and Muñoz, 2014, p.86). This means that each city is not a suburb of a larger city or one city in a collection of similarly sized cities—each city acts as the primary center for “job
opportunities, medical care, higher education resources, and a range of other services and amenities for the residents of the surrounding region” (ibid), improving the validity of comparison.

Each city is also of a medium, or mid-, size. Mid-sized cities stand in contrast to the large cities, which tend to have substantial financial resources and “civic capacity” to withstand major economic shifts and small cities, which are commonly characterized by high social cohesion (Kodrzycki and Muñoz, 2014, p.87).

Moreover, these four cities reside in the State of Illinois. Because each U.S. state’s laws vary, studying places within the same state means they are under the same judicial, legislative, and executive system, further improving the validity of comparison.

Finally, because of their historic growth trajectories, the selected cities contain a range of urban forms: each has a historic urban core and surrounding historic, pre-war neighborhoods, as well as surrounding post-war suburban growth from different decades, and even rural lands—all within their municipal boundaries. This cross-section of urban form adds another layer to the analysis.

DELIMITATIONS

This study analyzes shrinkage with the city boundaries, not regional shrinkage (unless appropriate for comparison purposes). Moreover, the content analysis was limited in scope to fit the timeframe of the study as well as increase the validity of the comparison between the four cities. Finally, population loss drives discussions about urban shrinkage, but declining wealth is also associated with urban decline. Namely, places that see an out-migration of people also have a “lower average economic status relative to the pre-shrinkage population” (Weaver et al., 2017, p.28). This paper does not address changes to populations’ income—this may be an area of future study.

3.2 Methods

Several different methods, both qualitative and quantitative, are employed to answer the three primary research questions. For example, in order to understand population patterns, I compared current data with historic population data for each city. Then, I compared the trends from each city with one another. This comparison reveals the breadth of change across the State of Illinois—population, population density, land area—and helps understand why some places may be shrinking more and faster than others, today and historically. A mixed-method approach allowed me to triangulate data sources and findings between qualitative and quantitative methods, enhancing validity (Grohat and Wang, 2013).
3.2.1 Population Trends & Shrinkage

Several approaches can be used to understand if a city is shrinking. One approach is the binary method (Weaver et al., 2017, p.7-8). This method requires comparing population over time in absolute terms, meaning any decrease in population is decline.

A second is the threshold method. This method requires setting a “threshold” value, in which “places that experienced population loss greater than or equal to the adopted critical value between a given set of time periods are labeled as shrinking” (Weaver et al., 2017, p.8). The value set is often arbitrary, and different researchers use different values, but the method still has value. Setting a threshold is useful for categorizing cities as shrinking or not as well as tracking population change over time. For example, cities that do not reach a threshold value for shrinkage by a set time may still show signs that they are trending, or “on pace,” to shrink (Weaver et al., 2017, p.17).

To determine if shrinkage is occurring or has occurred in the past, I first reviewed population statistics to understand the historical and current population trends in each of the four cities. I used the U.S. Census “place” data to track population growth at the city-level. I used “Place” data because “there is no reliable, centralized source of data on city boundaries” (Kodrzycki and Muñoz, 2015, p.114), so I followed the lead of shrinking cities scholars who rely on “place” data as a stand-in for city geography to study urban shrinkage (Weaver et al., 2017, p.12).

I used decennial U.S. Census data for each decade, from 1960–2010 (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Using population data from the U.S. Census is highly accurate and reveals long-term population trends. However, because data is collected only once every ten years, it obscures smaller peaks and dips that happen between counting. To capture more recent population trends, I used population estimates for individual years 2011-2017 from the American Community Survey (United States Census Bureau, 2018). American Community Survey provides data by year for the most recent seven years. However, this data is only an estimate of the actual population and considered less reliable than census data. Second, I collected population data at the metropolitan level (MSA) to see if regional trends mirrored city-level population trends and assess how recent regional population trends differ from historical ones.

3.2.2 Implications of Shrinkage

Land annexation—incorporating new territory into city boundaries—is a common “growth” strategy for U.S. cities, but a city’s ability to annex new land varies from region to region (Rusk, 2006). Growing the physical boundaries of a city through annexation not only opens up new lands for development, but it also captures populations and business activity that existed in these unincorporated territories before annexation.

Annexation tends to lower city-level population densities while increasing the total land area. It obscures an accurate reading of a city’s growth by re-adding residents through annexation that had previously moved out of the city and into unincorporated territory nearby. To understand the
changing boundaries of each city, I found each city’s areas using U.S. Census place data. Similarly, I calculated population densities for each decade using U.S. Census data.

Secondly, I found historic dwelling vacancy data for each city using U.S. census data. I attempted to compare this data with vacancy data provided to me by each city, county, or a particular level of government. However, each city maintains different types of vacancy data, which makes useful comparison impossible. For example, one city maintains a database of city-owned vacant properties—a small proportion of total vacant properties. Another keeps a database of all publicly and privately-owned vacant properties. Therefore, I discarded this information from comparisons.

3.2.3 Content Analysis & Local Planning Discourse

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis is a systemic reading of a document to understand what it is saying. There are two types: manifest and latent analysis. Manifest analysis is primarily a quantitative method. It is used to understand how often something is said or used in the document, typically by counting keywords. Latent analysis is primarily a qualitative method and is used to understand what text means in context (Hollander, 2018, p.124). Content analysis can be used to understand what cities are saying about themselves, their futures, and particular projects. It is “used to evaluate the content of a plan or zoning code,” to understand the “symbolic meaning” (Norton, 2008, p.433). Also, content analysis can reveal reasons for why cities do certain things. For example, a city may have a policy of annexation that is explained by studies that anticipate a steady increase in population and jobs.

Hollander’s (2018) book An Ordinary City inspired the content analysis section of this thesis. In it, Hollander completed an in-depth reading of 19 documents from New Bedford, Massachusetts. The focus on one city made this in-depth textual analysis possible. Hollander concluded that the City of New Bedford was engaging in “smart shrinkage” though they never labeled it such in its policies or plans.

Following Hollander’s (2018) example, I examined the most recent comprehensive plans for each of the four cities in this study—Decatur, Peoria, Rockford, Springfield. Fundamentally, I wanted to answer how these fit Oswalt’s (2006) four categories of urban shrinkage strategies: 1) deconstructing, 2) reevaluating, 3) reorganizing, and 4) imagining. I employed both manifest and latent analysis.

The keywords used in the manifest analysis were taken directly from Hollander (2018), which were established based on previous U.S. planning efforts and mirror 21st Century planning language. Using established keywords and categorization, as opposed to creating new keywords, provides some implicit validity to this study, which is often missing from content analysis (Norton, 2008). The keywords were counted first for the number of total occurrences. Next, if they related to shrinking and decline, they were counted. In making the separation of shrinking and non-shrinking related occurrences, one can deduce how often specific strategies were connected—or used to address—shrinking and decline. For example, this comparison helps determine if reevaluating strategies are more common than imagining, and what terms (i.e.,
keywords) are used to discuss these strategies. In addition to the four shrinkage strategies, I included a fifth category for growth keywords in order to understand how growth was being understood in the context of shrinkage, if at all.

Once the quantitative work of manifest analysis was complete, I examined how these keywords related to strategies within a shrinking cities framework using latent analysis. For latent analysis, I completed an in-depth reading of each cities’ comprehensive plan to understand proposed policies and strategies and determine their purpose. Unlike Hollander, I did not create a matrix to describe the “Reasons for Policies.” Because only one document per city—and not 19—was used in this analysis, the results only needed to be contextualized in text format, not in a chart or matrix relating one plan to another.

I chose to comprehensive plans for context analysis for several reasons. First, per Illinois Municipal Code 65 ILCS 5, comprehensive plans are the “master” planning documents required for all cities (Illinois General Assembly, 2019). Therefore, I knew each city selected for this study would have an update-to-date comprehensive plan. Secondly, additional planning documents, such as neighborhood master plans, generally align with comprehensive plans and are often considered amendments to them (Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission, 2018). Third, comprehensive plans tend to be completed by local authorities (not private consultants), require multiple departments be involved, and consider issues ranging from the block to the region. The breadth of material covered and agencies engaged make comprehensive plans useful documents to study local trends and challenges. They also set the tone and vision for a city. Finally, comprehensive plans include a wide range of policy suggestions and strategies, which can be compared to the categories of shrinking cities strategies outlined in Oswalt (2006).

There are several drawbacks to using comprehensive plans. For one, their recommendations are generally non-binding. Because they must work at a large scale—city, region, or supra-region—the content must be general and therefore less specific than other kinds of plans, such as area masterplans. Together, this may result in a comprehensive plan that says a lot but has a tenuous relationship to day-to-day planning (Norton, 2008). Moreover, as in the case of the four select cities, comprehensive plans can be done jointly by city and county (Decatur), completed for a city by another entity (Springfield), or lose their usefulness over time because of their 20-year timeframes (Rockford). Regardless of these drawbacks, comprehensive plans were determined to be the best documents for content analysis in this study.

INTERVIEWS

I conducted two to three semi-structured interviews with planners and economic development professionals in each of the four cities to complement the content analysis. Economic development professionals were included in interviews because this field often works in tandem with planning to bring people and jobs to a region. Moreover, economic development strategies often have spatial implications in the same way that urban planning policies have economic development implications—the two fields are interlinked. These interviews were conducted in-person, when possible, and over the phone. The identities and exact job titles of each interview
are kept anonymous, allowing interviewees to speak freely about their roles and the challenges they believe their cities face (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Interview List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decatur</td>
<td>Interviewee A</td>
<td>Urban planner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewee B</td>
<td>Urban planner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peoria</td>
<td>Interviewee C</td>
<td>Urban planner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewee D</td>
<td>Urban planner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewee E</td>
<td>Economic development professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockford</td>
<td>Interviewee F</td>
<td>Urban planner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewee G</td>
<td>Economic development professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield</td>
<td>Interviewee H</td>
<td>Urban planner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewee I</td>
<td>Economic development professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewee J</td>
<td>County planning professional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Semi-structured interviews are interviews with some structure—for example, pre-prepared questions—but an open feel, allowing the interviewee to provide more elaborate, in-depth responses and the interviewer to interject with comments and additional questions (Gillham, 2000). Semi-structured interviews were used to contextualize the comprehensive plans and the plan’s role in establishing (or not) a future direction for each city. Moreover, I used the interviews to shed light on policies, failed and successful, for managing new economic and demographic realities. In the interviews, I attempted to unpack how the interviewee, or their department, viewed changing circumstances in their city. See Appendix A for a list of interview questions. Note that some questions were not asked due to time constraints of the interview.
4 Analysis

This section contains the quantitative and qualitative analyses used to answer the three primary research questions.

4.1 Population Trends & Shrinkage

The section addresses the first research question: Are these cities shrinking and if so, to what extent? The section relies primarily on a comparison of current and historical population trends at the city and metropolitan area level.

4.1.1 City Population Trends

In absolute terms, population trends show that Decatur, Peoria, Rockford, and Springfield have all lost population from their respective peaks. There is significant variability in the persistence and severity of these losses. No city meets Schilling and Logan’s (2008) definition of sustained loss of 25% or higher over the past four decades and therefore cannot be deemed a “shrinking city” based on this definition. Decatur comes closest, losing 23.17% of its population since its peak in 1970. Peoria has lost half that, losing 11.09% of its population since its peak in 1980. Both Rockford and Springfield have sustained comparatively little population loss, at 3.81% and 1.19% respectively.

Figure 3: Chart of City Population Trends
All cities are currently on a path of population decline, having negative population growth between 2010 and 2017 (the year with most recently available data). Both Decatur and Rockford have lost city population every year from 2010–2017. Peoria began a population slide between 2013–2014, most recently losing 1.28% of city population between 2016–2017—the most substantial recorded loss of any city this decade. Springfield saw its city population decline for the first time in recorded history between 2012–2013. The losses have not abated since. While no city meets the aforementioned strict threshold of a shrinking city, each city has experienced a “sustained, downward, quantitative adjustments to the population,” i.e., shrinkage, according to the definition set by Weaver et al. (2017, p.3).
As previously discussed, suburbanization is a significant driver of urban decline. Cities experiencing decline often exist within growing regions, as urban residents flee the city for the periphery. As this happens, the proportion of city residents decreases relative to the population of the metropolitan area. In some cases, a city will lose population at a rate similar to the rate that its metropolitan area gains population, signally the geographic dispersion of a mostly stagnant population, sometimes referred to as “sprawl without growth” (Pendall, 2003).

Figure 8 reveals that these trends held for Decatur, Peoria, and Rockford. Decatur declined nearly 4% in relation to its metropolitan area, Peoria nearly 7%, and Rockford more than 10%. Springfield’s proportional hold on its surrounding metropolitan area has hovered around 54% since at least 1970. These figures suggest that Springfield successfully captured metropolitan growth within city boundaries, figuring in the Springfield’s decades of population growth.

Metropolitan area population trends show that from approximately 1970 to 2010, all cities save Springfield ceded proportions of city populations to their metropolitan areas. Meaning either the surrounding metropolitan area population increased proportionally more than the city population over this time or the metropolitan area population increased while the respective city lost
population. Both explanations suggest at least three of the four metropolitan areas suburbanized between 1970 to 2010.

Figure 9: Metropolitan Area (MSA) Population Trends

<table>
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<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decatur MSA</td>
<td>125,010</td>
<td>131,375</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>117,206</td>
<td>-10.79</td>
<td>114,706</td>
<td>-2.13</td>
<td>110,768</td>
<td>-3.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peoria MSA</td>
<td>341,979</td>
<td>365,864</td>
<td>6.98</td>
<td>358,552</td>
<td>-2.00</td>
<td>366,899</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>379,186</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockford MSA</td>
<td>272,063</td>
<td>279,514</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>283,719</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>320,204</td>
<td>12.86</td>
<td>349,431</td>
<td>9.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield MSA</td>
<td>171,020</td>
<td>187,770</td>
<td>9.79</td>
<td>189,550</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>201,440</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>210,170</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Around 2010, the metropolitan areas of all four cities stopped growing and even declined, indicated a change in the trend of metropolitan growth at the expense of city decline. This population slide has been typical for Decatur, where both city and metropolitan area have lost population in every decade since 1990. The duel metropolitan-city loss happened only once before in Peoria (1980–1900), but the area quickly recovered the population it lost over the next decade. Thus, the simultaneous population loss in city and metropolitan area is a new, and worrying, trend for both Rockford and Springfield, and unwelcome for all.

The extent of the population losses suggests that these cities and their surrounding metropolitan areas are less and less attractive regions in which to live, which has many implications for growth. Importantly, previous strategies for "growth" required annexation of adjacent land to inflate population growth rates somewhat artificially. While annexation may still be feasible on a small scale (see next section), it is unlikely to inflate population numbers as it had in the past unless current population trends reverse.

Figure 10: Metropolitan Area Population Change - % Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MSA</th>
<th>2011 % Change</th>
<th>2012 % Change</th>
<th>2013 % Change</th>
<th>2014 % Change</th>
<th>2015 % Change</th>
<th>2016 % Change</th>
<th>2017 % Change</th>
<th>2018 % Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decatur MSA</td>
<td>110,671</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>110,130</td>
<td>-0.49</td>
<td>109,563</td>
<td>-0.51</td>
<td>108,520</td>
<td>-0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peoria MSA</td>
<td>379,748</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>380,277</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>381,776</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>379,516</td>
<td>-0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockford MSA</td>
<td>347,766</td>
<td>-0.48</td>
<td>345,862</td>
<td>-0.55</td>
<td>344,761</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>342,515</td>
<td>-0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield MSA</td>
<td>211,713</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>212,080</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>211,702</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>211,685</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.3 Additional Signs of Decline

Like suburbanization, deindustrialization is another primary driver of urban decline. Loss of the manufacturing industry creates high unemployment, leads to population decline as people move seeking new employment elsewhere, and strains cities financially. Figure 11 reveals how significant the loss of manufacturing has been in each city, comparing local employment in manufacturing in 1980 to 2017.

The numbers mimic national trends. Springfield has always had a relatively diversified economy, though it is dependent on State government employment as the State’s capital city. It lost just 2% of manufacturing employment between 1980–2017. Decatur, Peoria, and Rockford all lost nearly half of their manufacturing employment in proportion to the economy between those years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Decatur</th>
<th>Peoria</th>
<th>Rockford</th>
<th>Springfield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980 (Manufacturing)</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017 (Manufacturing)</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Physical Implications of Decline

The section addresses the first research question: What are the implications of their shrinking? Essentially, this question asks how has the geographic distribution of people and boundaries of the four cities studied changed, and how does this relate to their population numbers. There are several ways to probe the implications of decline; this section only addresses a few.

4.2.1 Urban Boundaries

Cities are labeled “elastic” if they can grow their urban boundaries, typically through annexation. Those that cannot are labeled “inelastic.” One theory suggests that cities with elastic boundaries can effectively stave off decline by annexing land outside of the core city boundaries, capturing higher- and middle-income residents who live in the periphery and thus avoid the overconcentration of poverty (Rusk, 1993).

Figure 12 examines the expanding physical boundaries of each city in this study. Each city grew in size in every decade except 1980–1990, where both Decatur and Peoria land growth stalled. Incidentally, both cities and their respective regions lost population during this decade, suggesting that annexing land would not have changed the out-migration of the population during this decade.

Peoria grew the most overall, more than doubling in size from 15.2 square miles in 1960 to 48.01 square miles in 2017. The majority of this increase occurred between 1960–1970 when the city added 22.2 square miles of annexed land, the most substantial increase of any city. While land annexation happened in every decade, the largest increases occurred between 1960–1980. Since
then, the average amount of annexed land has fallen, suggesting that these four cities are running out of adjacent land that they can annex.

![Figure 12: Land Area (square miles)](image)

**Figure 13: City Land Area (in square miles) - % Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>Total % Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decatur</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>41.56</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>42.22</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>114.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peoria</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>146.1</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>48.01</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>215.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockford</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>56.01</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>61.08</td>
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<td>134.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springfield</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>59.48</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>177.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.2 Population Densities

Following the increase in their land area through annexation, population densities declined in every city in every decade. Decreases in population density occur for several years. The most obvious is that much of the land annexed is formerly unincorporated territory, with very low population densities. The addition of this land into the city boundaries lowers overall population densities. Second, several cities had declining populations already, which itself results in lower population densities. Annexation allows cities to recover some lost population, but this still results in lower population densities. Cities that once had urban population densities are now, because of excessive annexation, much closer to suburban population densities.

Figure 14: City Population Density
4.2.3 Vacant Properties

Cities are often a “patchwork of shrinking and stable neighbourhoods” (Shetty and Reid, 2012, p.203). Thus, even in cities like Springfield that have experienced population growth for decades tend to have declining neighborhoods. Vacant buildings are one of the most visible signs of urban decline. Thus, a city with high dwelling vacancies suggests the city, or at least neighborhoods within the city, is in decline.

In 2010, three cities had a record number of vacant dwellings: Decatur (3,790), Peoria (5,469), and Rockford (6,727). In these three cities, vacant dwellings accounted for between 10-11% of all dwellings in the city in 2010. They saw a more than 2% increase in vacancies between 2000–2010. The data for Springfield is better but not encouraging. In 2010, vacant dwellings accounted for 9%, or 5,015 dwellings, of Springfield’s dwellings. These trends reveal a rise in vacant dwellings between 1990–2010, which follows both national and state trends. However, all four cities had higher dwelling vacancies rates in 2000 and 2010 than the State of Illinois average (6.0% and 8.7%).

Figure 15: Percent of Vacant Dwellings

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Figure 15: Percent of Vacant Dwellings
The final section attempts to answer the third question: What is the current planning discourse around population decline and shrinking in each city? For this, I analyzed each cities’ comprehensive plan for content and interviewed several local planning and economic development officials.

I read the comprehensive plans to understand how each discussed growth, current demographics, and economic conditions, as well as to understand the planning framework of each plan. Initially, I expected each plan to emphasize strategies that more or less aligned with smart growth principles. Following content analysis best practices, I made no explicit determination of a policy or plan being good (Norton, 2017, p.449). Moreover, before embarking on the content analysis of each cities' comprehensive plan, I expected the newer comprehensive plans to be more likely than older plans to mention decline and to propose policies to reverse it.

Hollander’s (2018) latent content analysis revealed that the City of New Bedford essentially called for “smart shrinkage” via several strategies to manage decline, without explicitly stating so in the city’s numerous planning documents—the City never named smart shrinkage, smart decline, or rightsizing. I did not anticipate the four cities studied to call for smart shrinkage or to name it, in part because their population decline was neither as apparent nor as severe (save Decatur) as many case studies from the shrinking cities literature.

### Figure 16: Dwelling Vacancies by City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>National Units</th>
<th>National %</th>
<th>State Units</th>
<th>State %</th>
<th>Decatur Units</th>
<th>Decatur %</th>
<th>Peoria Units</th>
<th>Peoria %</th>
<th>Rockford Units</th>
<th>Rockford %</th>
<th>Springfield Units</th>
<th>Springfield %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>5,226,728</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>200,975</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>1,428</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2,327</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>2,999</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>1,747</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>6,369,044</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>259,051</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>2,498</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>4,388</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>2,478</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>3,068</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>10,316,268</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>304,035</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>3,457</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>3,284</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>3,307</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>3,528</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>10,424,540</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>293,836</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>3,153</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>3,926</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>4,412</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>5,112</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>14,988,438</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>459,743</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>3,790</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>5,469</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>6,727</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>5,015</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
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</table>
4.3.1 Latent Analysis – Decatur

Decatur’s Comprehensive Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Macon County and Decatur Comprehensive Plan or “One Community” Plan</th>
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<tr>
<td>Timeframe</td>
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<td><strong>Strategy Areas/Themes</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>1. Balanced Land Conservation and Development</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. An Accessible and Connected County</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A Quality of Life Community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A Diversified Economy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A Sense of Pride in Place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17: Land Area map of Decatur and Macon County
The City of Decatur’s comprehensive plan is a joint county/city plan. The plan oscillates between policies for countering shrinkage and accepting shrinkage, according to Hosper’s (2014) categories. Though Decatur’s population has been shrinking for decades, the plan only ever mentions this once, in reference to the decentralization of the urban population into the surrounding metropolitan region.

Ultimately, the majority of the plan’s language is in line with accepting shrinking. For example, it does not shy away from the word “decline” or speaking directly about the impact decline has had on the region. It recognizes the impact the economic restructuring has had on the City, stating: “Our City and County compete for a declining share of regional growth while, together, we face increased global competition for jobs and services in the 21st Century economy” (Macon County/Decatur, 2009, p.5).

Admitting that times are tough—for employment, citizens, city budgets—the plan suggests that an increase in volunteerism can fix local problems: “To that end, we must build on our history of self-sufficiency, not only to resolves issues in Decatur, but to insure that our surrounding towns continue to thrive and maintain their character” (p.24). This call for more bottom-up, and free, labor elicits echoes of Weaver et al.’s (2017) reorganizing principle of “building social capital.”

The plan divides into five main themes—“growth” is not one. Unlike the other three comprehensive plans studied, Decatur’s plan does not include exact population projections. This exclusion may be for political or self-esteem reasons, given the persistent negative population growth trends for the region. Surprisingly, the plan anticipates “modest population growth” (Macon County/Decatur, 2009, p.8) over the next 20 years, which translates to “an increase of 3,455 households” (p.32) in Decatur by the year 2030. It is unclear from the context how many people 3,455 households translates to or which years the extrapolated numbers begin.

Instead of future growth, the plan focuses on quality of life issues, such as improved schools, transportation, homeownership rates, and high-quality environments. It suggests new development be built “on vacant and underutilized land within and adjacent to the developed areas, especially within the municipalities” (Macon County/Decatur, 2009, p.5).

The plan struggles to define “good” development, what and where is “good.” For example, development in the core is “good” because the central city is “important to the health of the entire County” (Macon County/Decatur, 2009, p.14). It recommends infilling empty sites with mixed-use development. The plan goes on to say, “While there is a consensus that the location for new development should be market driven, opinions regarding the location of this new development are mixed. Many believe the primary location for new development should be within Decatur, while others feel new development should occur in Macon County’s outlying communities or around the fringe of existing development” (p.14). Therefore, the question of sprawl is unresolved. Finally, the plan recommends reevaluating strategies such as changing zoning laws—specifically, adopting a form-based code—to improve the attractiveness of downtown (Macon County/Decatur, 2009, p.115).

The plan falls short of imagining strategies. It proposes a concerted effort to build on the region’s natural assets to improve quality of life and suggests recreational and heritage tourism as growth industries. Of the four plans analyzed, Decatur’s comprehensive plan places the most emphasis
on land conservation and preservation of farmland, in part, because farming and agribusiness are the foundation of Decatur’s economy, today and historically.

There is a recognition that “new economy” workers want live or be near stimulating urban environments (Macon County/Decatur, 2009, p.16) and that the “long-term economic viability” of the County “depends upon our developing, attracting, and maintaining that work force” (p.16). Yet, no new vision is put forward on how to establish this kind of environment. There is a recognition that agriculture will continue to be the City’s leading industry in the future, and that the City can “become the center of technological innovation and research in agri-business, healthcare and other regionally significant industries” (p.6). This future path makes sense considering soy and cornfields cover 84% of Macon County’s land (p.8).
### 4.3.2 Manifest Analysis - Decatur

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<th>Deconstruction keywords</th>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renovation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Converted/convert/converting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compact/compact development*</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conversion</td>
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<td>Redesign</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolve</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstruct(ion)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing stock</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of river ways, watersheds, parkland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce infrastructure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismantling/dismantled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternative</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuse</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacant</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agricultural</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reinvestment</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Networks</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban sports/sports</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferable development rights</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In general, the discussion of deconstructing strategies in Decatur’s comprehensive plan is limited. For example, the plan mentions infrastructure frequently but rarely as it pertains to shrinking and decline. Instead, the plan suggests reinvesting in existing infrastructure and the central city because projected future growth is low (Macon County/Decatur, 2009, p.8). It also suggests the use of Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies and intelligent systems as ways to minimize the construction of new infrastructure (p.81). There are no
mentions of decommissioning or dismantling existing infrastructure. Instead, the plan stresses efficient use and “cost effectiveness,” claims that current infrastructure is sufficient to support anticipated growth, and recommends maintaining current investment levels (Macon County/Decatur, 2009).

Renovation, restoration, and rehabilitation keywords relate to historic buildings in the central city and the rehabilitation of older housing stock for new uses (Macon County/Decatur, 2009, p.61). The plan recommends several policies to accelerate this work, including “rehabilitation grants and loans to enable homeowners or landlords to make needed improvements within their financial means” (p.51), property tax incentives “within homes owned or assisted through employer provided support” (p.61), and “ownership programs tied to tax reactivation efforts on city owned properties” (p.61).

REEVALUATING
Reevaluating keywords focus on empty land and vacant lots. For example, the plan suggests the creation of “vacant or abandoned lot purchase opportunities that favor adjacent homeowners, local developers who commit to constructing desired housing types priced to reflect local market” (Macon County/Decatur, 2009, p.51).

The keyword “agriculture” and “agricultural” are used frequently, which is unsurprising given the sector’s importance to local and state economies. The plan links the City’s identity, character, and jobs to the preservation of agricultural land. However, the plan does not link agriculture to decline or shrinking (e.g., using vacant land for urban agriculture).

REORGANIZING
“Competitive position” played a small but insightful role in understanding how the city and regional authorities perceive threats and opportunities to their economic development. The plan calls for positioning the downtown “as an economic and civic center of the County and the focal point of catalytic investments in education and services in the surrounding neighborhoods” (Macon County/Decatur, 2009, p.6), reminiscent of Harvey’s entrepreneurial urban strategies to create new centers of consumption in the City’s downtown.

Interestingly, the Decatur comprehensive plan is the only plan in this study to employ Transfer of Development Rights as a tool to preserve farmland and rural character.

IMAGINING
Surprisingly, few imagining keywords relate to decline, categorically. The plan asserts that “It is the culmination of an historic initiative to define a new vision for our community’s future growth
and development” (p.5) but stops far short of proposing a new identity or radical vision for Decatur that fully accepts its shrinking.

Where the plan does borrow reimagining strategies is tourism, specifically increasing recreational tourism by linking it to the City’s recreational assets and increasing heritage tourism by strengthening the City’s connection to U.S. President Abraham Lincoln (p.108).

**GROWTH**

Mentions of “new growth” within Decatur’s comprehensive plan are relatively muted. The plan tempers growth expectations with several references to “limited growth” and “lack of growth” and makes one explicit mention to the dichotomy of fringe growth and urban decay (p.13). Interestingly, the plan shifts the standard growth narrative, opting to instead focus on equitable and inclusive economic growth.

**4.3.3 Interviews - Decatur**

**DECONSTRUCTING**

The City of Decatur’s Economic and Community Development department has been working on a citywide revitalization strategy since 2017. When complete, the City’s Revitalization Strategy will be the primary plan guiding the City’s response to urban decline and shrinking, not the comprehensive plan or any other document. The purpose of the strategy is threefold: 1) re-purposing of vacant lots, 2) demolishing dilapidated homes, and 3) providing incentives to encourage residents to make improvements.

According to a local urban planner, there is consensus at all levels of city leadership that “demolitions need to be addressed” because the majority of currently vacant buildings are unsafe for habitation. Annual budgets generally include $300,000 for demolitions. At a cost of $10,000 – 14,000 per demolition, annual budgets only ever chip away at the surplus of abandon properties (Interviewee A, 2019). Thankfully, the City has received $1 million grant from the local Howard G. Buffett Foundation for revitalization work, including demolitions (Nolan, 2019).

The City of Decatur has looked to other U.S. cities to find strategies that will help them address urban decline. For example, the City of New Orleans’ response to Hurricane Katrina inspired Decatur’s revitalization approach. Workers from the Economic and Community Development department surveyed every neighborhood in the City, scoring vacant lots and properties based on New Orleans’-inspired criteria. For example, “Is the grass overgrown? Is the roof caved in?” (Interviewee B, 2019).

**REEVALUATING**

The excess of vacant lots precipitated the need for a renewed and comprehensive strategy for a neighborhood revitalization plan. As of 2018, there were a total of 3,845 publicly and privately owned vacant lots in Decatur (Macon County Supervisor of Assessments Office, email communication, 2019). Macon County owns more than 700 of them, and they are known as trustee lots. After years of discussion, Macon County approved the sale of all trustee lots to the
City of Decatur in 2019. They will take over full ownership soon after, paying the County $75 for each lot, then be able to exert greater control over their reuse (Cook, 2019).

The planners steering the revitalization plan are discussing a sideyard program (aka “zoning lots” program), demolitions, and city-led home rehabs and sales. The establishment of an official land bank is an emerging idea (Interviewee A, 2019).

REORGANIZING

Reorganizing strategies are mentioned rarely in Decatur’s comprehensive plan but have had an outsized impact on local planners’ efforts. The City has faced financial stress for more than a decade. In 2013, city planning staff was cut significantly, with eight staff either leaving due to retirement or layoffs. In 2015, the City consolidated departments under a new city manager (who has since departed). According to interviews, the purpose of the consolidation was to improve efficiency and save on costs. The consolidation eliminated some positions, added new positions, including a role working exclusively on community revitalization, and created the Department of Economic and Community Development.

Interviewees suggest that city budgets and lack of “manpower” are the most significant constraints to on-going revitalization efforts—staff turnover has slowed their progress. In order to combat this, two planners interviewed suggested the City needs to be data-driven in its decision-making and to have a reality-driven plan. The City, of course, has limited capacity to collect or analyze the data right now. It is still a mostly paper department—though this is slowly changing. The City has had to become more strategic with their resources and time, which has resulted in less time enforcing zoning codes, shifting instead to site plan work and rezoning requests.

The current regional competition adds a layer of difficulty. Attracting new businesses to Decatur is difficult because nearby communities lower their sales tax and offer incentives to lure businesses away, inducing sprawl and seeding decline in Decatur. Negative population growth makes it difficult for existing businesses to remain open, forcing them to close and leaving the remaining residents with fewer choices. Neighborhood food deserts are a common problem. The visual abandonment of large commercial sites is another. One planner pointed out the rising vacancy rate of big-box commercial centers, using a former grocery store building that has been vacant since 2000 as one example. Redevelopment of these sites is difficult in markets that are losing population, such as Decatur. The costs and the risks are too high and so will remain vacant in perpetuity.

GROWTH

One interviewee stressed the limitations of the revitalization plan: it is not going to bring Decatur back to growth. He said, “We need to recognize that we’re not going to get 20,000 people back” (Interviewee A, 2019). Despite this, the sentiment of many in leadership positions is “we need to bring industry back” and industry will bring people back.

One interviewee suggested that there are opportunities to capture commuters who come to Decatur for work but do not live there. “People will go where the jobs are,” he told me. Currently, “people drive 45 minutes to one hour each way every day to work in Decatur because the job market is strong. Or they will stay in Decatur during the work week” (Interviewee B,
Decatur is affordable: a house that costs $100,000 in Decatur would cost 1.5x as much in a similarly sized community an hour away, where many Decatur workers currently live. So why aren’t people moving closer to these jobs? Quality of life is one explanation offered.

4.3.4 Conclusion – Decatur

Though the Decatur comprehensive plan mentions modest future population growth, the majority of strategies suggest the City and County leaders have accepted the region’s demographic reality and instead pursue strategies that mitigate the adverse effects of sustained population loss (Hospers, 2014). The plan tempers growth expectations with several references to “limited growth” and “lack of growth” though never asserts that the City will continue to shrink (Macon County/Decatur, 2009, p.8).

The City’s primary tool for addressing decline is a new neighborhood revitalization strategy. Inspired by New Orleans’ planning work post-Hurricane Katrina, this plan will supersede the comprehensive plan when completed. Ever since the City consolidated departments and created a position specifically to address neighborhood revitalization, the City has emphasized deconstructing strategies to address urban decline, specifically the demolition of abandoned properties. More than other cities studied, Decatur succeeded in receiving demolition grants from the State of Illinois (City of Decatur, Status Report 6.4.18, 2018) and a local foundation (Nolan, 2019), likely because its decline has been the most severe and persistent of the four cities studied.
### Peoria’s Comprehensive Plan

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<th>Grow Peoria</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
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<td>Areas/Themes</td>
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1. Public safety
2. Education
3. Economic development
4. Infrastructure

“Grow Peoria” is both the name and vision of Peoria’s comprehensive plan. The document takes a pro-growth stance from the beginning, explaining that the primary role of the City of Peoria is to create an environment that can grow and maintain jobs. Education, climate, and cost of living are not enough to bring and keep residents in Peoria. The plan suggests that Peoria will be successful if it creates and retains jobs. This reading of the City parallels Molotch’s (1976) “city
as a growth machine” model, wherein population and economic growth are considered the essential functions of a city.

The plan is clear that outward growth is fundamental to Peoria’s growth strategy. First, the plan states that past annexations stopped the City’s population from falling precipitously, noting that population has “been flat for the past 40 years” (Grow Peoria, 2011, p.38). It later concludes: “The City must continue to provide for external growth opportunities for residents who want to live in contemporary subdivisions” (p.65).

Population projections included in the plan suggest that Peoria will experience limited growth over the next 15 to 20 years (Grow Peoria, 2011, p.34). However, population trends this decade (-5.19% growth between 2010–2017) raise questions about whether even these tame population projections are an overestimate (see Figure 20). The policy agenda is countering shrinkage because the primary goal of the plan is to foster growth, and the stance on population loss is that it is a temporary trend.

Where the growth will occur is predicated on past trends, namely growing north and northwest while “shrinking in the areas of the City below War Memorial Drive” (Grow Peoria, 2011, p.34), a path dependent stance on the future of housing trends. This inability to steer growth and change is a common theme. The authors of the document (i.e., local city planners) seem to abdicate planning responsibility with the statement: “What type of growth the City wants to encourage is ultimately entirely up to the City Council” (p.1).

The quality of education is a significant threat to the City’s growth potential. Enrollment at the Peoria School District “has declined by 50%, from a high of almost 30,000 students prior to
1970, to a current enrollment of 14,000 students,” according to the plan (Grow Peoria, 2011, p.58). A second school district—Dunlap School District—is located primarily in the northern and affluent section of the City (annexed after 1970), as well as adjacent communities. This district has seen the opposite trend. Seventy-five percent of the students in the district live within the City of Peoria (p.70). Moreover, the plan admits that competition for where people want to live and business relocate is high between neighboring localities. The City assumes this “competitive position” because of a unique situation as a large city surrounded by a handful of smaller yet sizable cities and towns (see Figure 19).
### 4.3.6 Manifest Analysis - Peoria

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DECONSTRUCTING

Overall, the Peoria comprehensive plan contains few deconstructing keywords that relate to decline and shrinking. Infrastructure is mentioned the most, five times concerning shrinking. The
The plan characterizes Peoria’s infrastructure as decaying, deteriorating, and deficient. The plan also admits that the City’s public school infrastructure is in decline.

The other mentions of deconstructing terms relate to the rehabilitation of older housing and includes the charge that the City’s older housing “becomes a detriment” rather than an asset “once in disrepair” (Grow Peoria, 2011, p.43). Other mentions of deconstructing strategies are scant.

REEEVALUATING
Reevaluating strategies focus mostly on vacant land and buildings in disrepair. Vacant land is a growing problem. The plan suggests a policy of “strategic purchase and demolition of vacant and nonrepairable properties” to balance the supply of housing with demand (Grow Peoria, 2011, p.43). The plan proclaims the need to reinvest in the “deteriorating housing market” (p.43).

REORGANIZING
No reorganizing keywords relate to decline and shrinking. One possible reason: the City consolidated governments departments before undertaking this plan (see Interviews section).

The plan recognizes Peoria’s aging population, stating “recreational opportunities offered in Peoria may also have to be adjusted to fit the new age demographics” (p.36). Unlike in Decatur, Peoria’s comprehensive plan does not suggest heritage or recreational tourism as potential growth industries. Nor does the plan seek to reposition the region economically, via new regional connections. Instead, the discussion of connectivity focuses on connectivity between subdivisions. Competition for economic development between neighboring cities and towns is one explanation for this lack of regional cooperation.

IMAGINING
The plan contains a plethora of general statements about “vision.” In a few instances, they imply that the City is ready to go in a new direction. More specifically, a new trajectory for the City’s oldest neighborhoods and “alternate future land use” (p.64) for primarily industrial waterfront land. The plan also foresees the downtown expanding to be once again “a regional commercial and cultural draw” (p.21).

Aside from these few mentions, the plan leans on best urban planning practices most heavily (e.g., implement Complete Streets, improve the downtown, reduce crime) instead of re-envisioning itself, suggesting that the City’s strategy is to continue on its current trajectory in order to return to growth.

GROWTH
Compared to the three other plans, Peoria’s comprehensive plans relate the least to shrinking in total mentions. This is both surprising and unsurprising. It is surprising because Peoria has seen waves of population loss and industrial contraction in the past, most significantly in the 1980s when its largest manufacturer Caterpillar restructured (Grow Peoria, 2011). The City has only grown slowly since. It would seem that these past trends would have inoculated comprehensive planning writers with a concern that similar trends might return. Plus, the lasting economic and spatial consequences of previous declines still need addressing today. The lack of mentions to
Decline and shrinking is unsurprising given that the plan is titled “Grow Peoria” and from the outset takes a pro-growth approach to comprehensive planning. The authors may have guessed that the use of “decline” keywords and strategies, at least about disinvested historic neighborhoods, might muddy efforts to convey that the whole city plans to grow. Other explanations are possible.

4.3.7 Interviews - Peoria

DECONSTRUCTING

The City of Peoria expends considerable resources on abandon property demolition. The City runs a Blight Reduction Program (BRP) that acts as an unofficial land bank, allowing the City to tear down approximately 100 derelict properties per year. The City spent more than $1 million in 2017 on the demolition of 74 homes, paid by city budgets and external grants. The City was on track to spend a similar amount in 2018 (Kaergard, 2018).

According to one urban planner, demolition of “the worst of the worst” buildings is easy. These homes are too far gone ever to be habitable (Interviewee D, 2019). It is far trickier to decide the fate of “the annoying middle child”—homes in states of extreme disrepair but still inhabited, often by the most vulnerable populations in the City. These properties are unlikely ever to be improved for various economic reasons. “What do you do?” he asked rhetorically (ibid).

REEVALUATING

Limited resources have significantly held back planning efforts in the City. There is sense from the professionals that I spoke to that they could, and should, do a lot more. If only they had a more sizable staff.

To counter staffing and budgets shortages as well as save future costs, the Community Development Department spends approximately $100,000 per year on vacant lot maintenance. Inspired by Philadelphia’s Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, the City hires contractors to mow vacant lots and clear trash in order to reduce crime, beautify the neighborhood, and keep property values from depreciating. Though Peoria does not keep its own statistics, it knows the program works because Philadelphia’s recorded success. Studies have shown that keeping vacant lots mowed and clean can translate into a 30% increase in adjacent home values (Wachter, 2005).

Like many Midwest cities, the City of Peoria has a combined sewer overflow system (CSO), which means when a storm overtaxes the sewer system, untreated sewerage is mixed with rainwater runoff and dumped into local waterways. The City is required to address the CSO issue under a consent decree with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Many local leaders view this decree as an “unfunded mandate” and actively fight against it. Moreover, the issue affects the oldest parts of the City, which are its most diverse neighborhoods and where intergenerational poverty is high (Interviewee C, 2019).

Led by the City’s Innovation Team, the City looked at ways to reevaluate something they had a lot of: vacant land and public right of way in the form of streets. After months of deliberation and debate, the City is addressing the problem with green infrastructure improvements that will increase the amount of rainwater the naturally infiltrates into the ground, reducing the burden on
the CSO system. In 2017, the City approved the creation of a stormwater utility, which will include new user fees (or a “rain tax”) to fund these green infrastructure improvements. The project has not yet received a final green light, meaning the new utility is not yet official and newly-elected councilmembers have sworn to fight it.

REORGANIZING

Though the Grow Peoria comprehensive plan does not allude to reorganizing, the City has recently consolidated departments. According to one urban planner, the decision to consolidate was not driven by “decline” but was rather a strategic decision driven by retirements and a desire to streamline government processes. The newly created Community Development Department is a combination of the former Inspection department and Growth and Development department. The new department is much leaner than it was in growth times but has been able “to squeeze efficiency out of ever smaller staff” (Interviewee D, 2019). Innovation has crept in. City departments host a “one-stop shop” once a week, where residents can come in and discuss issues with fire, building inspector, economic development, and other city officials.

In Peoria, annual budget cuts are frequent. As described in an interview, when the next budget cycle comes around, a “protect your own” ethos pervades departments, dis-incentivizing cross-departmental collaboration (Interviewee D, 2019). During budget crises, the City Council, tasked with passing the annual budget, typically vote to retain core functions like police and fire and cut auxiliary services. Planning and economic development department budgets are frequently subjected to cuts, in part because some councilors believe privatizing or outsourcing these services is possible.

As far as regional competition, one planner confirmed sentiments expressed in the comprehensive plan. He said that while there is no competition between staff at various city agencies—“we talk and we work together”—developers still pit cities against one another, in part because there are several sizable towns in the region (e.g., East Peoria, Pekin, Washington) spread across two counties, creating a competitive regional market for economic development (Interviewee D, 2019). There are “high transaction costs” for adjacent communities to cooperate with Peoria and each other on economic development matters—cooperating might mean they lose out on a new business or homes (Weaver, 2017, p.158). These neighboring communities see no incentives to cooperate, and there are few means to force cooperation among them, keeping regional cooperation low. This old model of competing for economic development “gave us our current state of affairs,” according to one economic development professional (Interviewee E, 2019). To her, there is a pervasive ethos of Peoria vs. “enter any nearby city,” and it has exacerbated Peoria’s decline.

IMAGINING

The City of Peoria is unlike any other city studied, or in the State of Illinois for that matter. It has an Office of Innovation (i-Team). Originally started in 2015 with a 3-year grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies, this is a department within the city administrator’s office that acts as in-house innovation consultants. Much of the team’s work includes reimagining strategies.

Reimagining what is possible in Peoria is tough. In one interview, Peoria’s civic leadership was described as an “old boys club” where decision-making is about maintaining power, not opening
up the government (Interviewee C, 2019). Moreover, there is a persistent belief amongst elected and non-elected leadership, and pervasive in the City’s comprehensive plan, that the “hinterlands” provide the wealth of the City, and thus growing outward is good for the future.

In 2019, the work of the Peoria Innovation Team has turned inward, looking to improve the performance of city government by researching and then implementing outcomes-based budgeting. This is essentially an attempt to “revamp everything at once” that uses metrics and targets in budgetary decisions (Interviewee C, 2019). The hope is that the new system will be in place for the 2021 budget cycle, which is a fast change-over from the grow machine model previously examined. If successful, the outcomes-based budget approach could inspire other path-dependent governments of shrinking places to change as well.

GROWTH

A few interviewees agreed that the City lacks a clear vision, though one urban planner offered: “All the councilmembers want to make Peoria a good place for development” (Interviewee D, 2019). The people in charge of development decisions are aggressively pro-growth, and there does not seem to be any sign of this changing.

In the old economic development model, it was easy and strategic to go after one large company (the “big fish”) with incentives. However, economic restructuring hit Peoria particularly hard in the 1980s. According to one economic development professional, Peoria has “lost the capacity to compete,” in part because markets are now global. Plus, as domestic markets change, especially in retail, large developers have become increasingly disinterested in places like Peoria (Interviewee E, 2019). It is difficult for the City to incentivize businesses when it is losing population. More than once, interviewees described Peoria as being at a crossroads. The old economic development models no longer work, but the heads of the economic development agencies protect themselves within a path-dependent, pro-growth economic development model.

The Innovation Team has tried to get local leaders and citizens to think differently about growth—and who can make it happen. In 2018, the team invited a small non-profit group called the Incremental Development Alliance to host a workshop on how locals can engage in small-scale, incremental building development. Getting small businesses and local community members to see the potential in small development sites is crucial for smaller cities like Peoria, according to one urban planner. Cities like Peoria have lost their small-scale, incremental developers over the years, even though this is how cities like Peoria organically built decades. He asserted that “if we don’t build small developers, we will be a lot worse off in 10-15 years” (Interviewee C, 2019).

4.3.8 Conclusion – Peoria

The City of Peoria is unique in this study for several reasons. For one, the City operates an unofficial land bank for dealing with abandoned properties. Second, the City has an Innovation Team that has introduced a number of reevaluating, reorganizing, and reimagining strategies to tackle multiple cities problems, including those related to decline. Third, there are over 100 active neighborhood associations in Peoria, which is “above par” for a city of its size (Interviewee E, 2019). The City of Peoria also boosts a people-based initiative for stemming population loss and improving educational attainment. Called Peoria Promise, this program
provides free college tuition to a local community college to any student who graduates from a
Peoria-area high school. The program dispersed more than $4.8 million in scholarships from
2008-2018 and is funded exclusively via private donations (Peoria Promise, 2019). A similar
program in Kalamazoo, Michigan, a shrinking city, inspired Peoria Promise, a first of its kind

Peoria Promise and the City’s strategy for maintaining vacant lots prove that Peoria is willing to
borrow great ideas from other places. Moreover, the Innovation Team's work proves that the City
is willing to develop new strategies as well. Together, the City’s programs go much further than
its comprehensive plan does to provide a framework for addressing the side effects of urban
decline.
4.3.9 Latent Analysis – Rockford

Figure 22: Land Area map of Rockford and Winnebago County

Rockford’s Comprehensive Plan

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<th>Rockford’s 2020 Comprehensive Plan: Entering the 21st Century</th>
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Rockford’s 2020 comprehensive plan is both the oldest (dating back to 2004) and longest (138 pages, without Appendices) studied. The plan was adopted before shrinking cities literature became popular, so it was unlikely that the plan would place a heavy emphasis on shrinking and decline.

Similar to the Peoria comprehensive plan, the Rockford comprehensive plan includes a disclaimer regarding the kind of development and growth expected in Rockford. Regarding single-use suburban development, the plan states: “While this plan assumes that this type of development will continue to predominate over the next 20 years, there’s always the chance that something will come along to change that. If and when that happens, we need to be prepared to deal with it” (City of Rockford, 2004, p.1).

The discussion of growth in the plan is mixed. There is an obvious “pro-growth” bias behind the report that asserts population growth equals success, interceded with some recognition that not all growth is good or equitable. The plan acknowledges that growth in some areas (e.g., the east side) “have been at the expense of the older parts of town” (City of Rockford, 2004, p.14). Moreover, the plan asserts: “We also need to grow smarter. If we don’t, unresolved problems such as abandoned housing and vacant storefronts will keep moving outward. The same forces affecting older parts of Rockford will affect what is now the fringe area a generation or two later. In other words, today’s winners will become tomorrow’s losers” (p.26). This statement is a clear recognition that decline in Rockford has resulted in building abandonment and that the City needs to prioritize solutions to this problem.

The plan acknowledges that growth projections from previous comprehensive plans were too generous. Though the plan maintains future growth is all but inevitable, it employs three low-, mediums, and high growth scenarios to understand the possible futures (see Figure 23). All three growth projections are higher than current population trends suggest is likely, suggesting the plan continues a pattern of submitting generous growth projections.

The Rockford comprehensive plan provides the most recommendations of any plan for dealing with vacant lands and properties. The plan starts by acknowledges the problem of high housing vacancies rates (7% of all housing in 2000) and admits that a decrease in population density has implications on per capita “cost of City services, environmental costs, and the impact on a dwindling supply of prime farmland” (p.19). In order to combat rising vacancy, the plan suggests creating a local land bank. Nearly 20 years later, the regional planning council created a multi-jurisdictional land bank called the Northern Illinois Land Bank Authority (personal email, 2019). A unique reevaluating strategy suggested in the plan includes accepting significant housing losses by de-densifying neighborhoods where appropriate and engaging in revitalization and rehabilitation plans where not—an interesting intersection between counting and accepting shrinkage policies, per Hospers (2014).

The plan makes it clear that the City’s tax base must continue to grow in order for the City to provide a high-level of services to its citizens. The primary method for growing the tax base has been welcoming retail. This position on “growth” helps explain the City’s strategy since the mid-80s to accommodate the shift to big-box retail. Eschewing development on the City’s periphery would have meant losing businesses and their sales and property taxes to other jurisdictions, which the plan declares “would have been devastating” (p.98). The plan endorses a narrative of
protecting sales tax base by “outcompeting” other cities in the region. This protective stance makes sense in context. Like nearly all U.S. cities, property and sales are primary sources of City revenue. The City has faced financial challenges for years because retail sales tax has been lower than projected, forcing staff layoffs (City of Rockford, 2004, p.100).

What is unique and somewhat prophetic on the part of the plan is the recognition that retail trends, such as the growth in big-box retail, are continually changing and asserting that the City needs to be proactive to address these shifts.

The plan also spends several paragraphs explaining that the region depends on an attractive and viable downtown, that outsiders’ impressions of downtown colors their perception of the City. It follows then that the plan promotes historic preservation as a tool to retain “the physical evidence of the history and individual character of Rockford” (p.119) as well as improve the viability of the downtown and surrounding historic neighborhoods.
## 4.3.10 Manifest Analysis - Rockford

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DECONSTRUCTING

Rehabilitation of housing and infrastructure is a primary focus of deconstructing terms in Rockford’s comprehensive plan. The plan suggests a housing rehab program to improve neighborhoods by maintaining vulnerable housing and arresting depreciated housing values. Moreover, the plan supports strategies such as adaptive reuse that restore structures to their original appearance. The plan suggests vacant lots be converted to new land uses without...
providing details on how to do this at a time when the City is experiencing an increase in dilapidated urban housing stock.

Infrastructure is mentioned frequently, though rarely concerning decline and shrinking. The plan instead focuses on the “return on investment” of infrastructure decisions. The plan does aptly point out that the City “cannot afford to walk away from or minimize the public infrastructure that’s already in place” (City of Rockford, 2004, p.101).

REEEVALUATING
Vacant land is a significant concern in this plan, whether in a residential, industrial, or commercial context—the plan states that the City must address the glut of vacant properties. For industrial properties, site remediation is critical so that the City not “be faced with a substantial area of vacant and abandoned industrial properties at its center” (City of Rockford, 2004, p.7).

The plan includes several ideas to encourage development on vacant land such as “the use of split-rate property taxes to encourage development on vacant or blighted pieces of land in existing communities” (City of Rockford, 2004, p.29). It also recommends converting vacant warehouses into residences and being proactive by developing a process for addressing vacant “big box” stores and other franchise establishments, anticipating their future decline (p.99). Finally, the plan pursues policies of “neighborhood reinvestment, redevelopment and infill development.” (p.91). Few instances outside of vacant land and building meet the criteria for reevaluating strategies that address decline and shrinking.

REORGANIZING
The plan mentions few reorganizing keywords in total. Regional connectivity and linkages most often refer to car and train connections to Chicago. This reference is unsurprising considering Rockford’s proximity to Chicago, which is the largest employment market in the Midwest.

Interestingly, the plan emphasizes neighborhood planning and the participation of neighborhood organizations involved in the planning process in an attempt to capture and build social capital in the wake of declining planning capacity (Hospers, 2014).

IMAGINING
The Rockford comprehensive plan does not provide a wholly reimagined vision for the City, but instead embraces common 21st Century urban planning practices (e.g., highlighting cultural and creative assets like public art, promoting a sense of place). It does recognize heritage tourism and the City’s architectural heritage as local assets, suggesting they may be building blocks for a new image and new industries. The plan connects heritage tourism to quality of life concerns and the economic wellbeing of current and future generations.

GROWTH
While “growth” is a dominant term in the plan, only a few instances connect growth to decline or shrinking. It is unapologetic in its embrace of Smart Growth principles, allowing them to influence strategies within the plan and informing “where and how to grow (City of Rockford, 2004, p.28). The plan admits that growth in some neighborhoods has facilitated decline in others.
and demands that redevelopment accompany future growth. That is to say, the City’s growth strategy is one of simultaneous internal (i.e., infill) and external (i.e., sprawl) growth.

4.3.11 Interviews - Rockford

DECONSTRUCTING

Today, many of Rockford’s most well-publicized projects are adaptive reuses of old industrial buildings. Rockford has been “extremely successful and extremely aggressive” in receiving federal and state dollars to remediate brownfield sites (Interviewee G, 2019). Without such grants, it would be near impossible for the City or developer to redevelop these sites. Brownfield projects take years to complete, often more than a decade. According to one economic development professional, they pay off in the long-term and so the City continues to pursue brownfield redevelopment as a core tenet of its economic development policy.

Persistence is key. The number of vacant sites, both small residential properties and large industrial ones, is vast. One interviewee quantified the number by saying, “We have more in Rockford than I can tackle in my entire career” (Interviewee G, 2019). He expressed hope that the newly launched Northern Illinois Land Bank Authority will accelerate the redevelopment of vacant land.

REEVALUATING

Unlike Decatur, Peoria, and Springfield, the City of Rockford employs tactical urbanism—that is, investing a small amount of the city budget to test ideas temporarily, to see if they work and should become more permanent—to reevaluate both vacant land and public infrastructure. Their 2015 Downtown Strategic Action Plan defines the City’s tactical urbanism approach. According to one urban planner, the plan has been highly successful in the redevelopment of downtown Rockford and encouraging residents to experience the downtown, changing their perceptions in the process. He described the 2015 Downtown Strategic Action Plan as an implementation plan that “nets together” all other plans to “rebuild the city” (Interviewee F, 2019).

The City employs tactical urbanism in various neighborhoods and other commercial centers, too. So far, it has tested temporary traffic circles, striped temporary bike lanes, and narrowed four-lane roads down to two lanes. With the help of volunteers, the City is currently piloting the use of decoratively painted boards used to board up vacant residential properties. The idea is to beautify blight and bring public art into more neighborhoods.

Like Peoria, Philadelphia’s Neighborhood Transformation Initiative inspired Rockford’s approach to maintaining vacant properties. The City partners with a minority-owned business to mow vacant lots regularly, to keep the lots from becoming unsightly dumping grounds for refuse. The City suspects the program keeps crime rates lower and adjacent home values higher, as has been the result in Philadelphia and elsewhere.

Empty commercial spaces are a growing problem. While discussing retail vacancies, one economic development professional echoed a strategy straight from Rockford’s comprehensive plan: the City’s economic development strategies have shifted away from trying to attract big-box retailers. Retail is changing, he said. The City has already seen significant disruptions in
retail, with at least two 100,000 square foot big-box stores sitting vacant and dozens more 20-30,000 square foot spaces having sat empty for years. He compared the so-called national “retail apocalypse” to the industrial downturn in the 1970s and 1980s, positing that there will be similar amounts of vacant greyfield space in the next decade as the City had brownfield space in previous decades (Interviewee G, 2019).

REORGANIZING
According to one economic development professional, Rockford’s proximity to Chicago has hurt it economically and demographically, suggesting at least some of the recent population decline was from residents decamping for better employment opportunities and amenities in Chicago. Rockford competes with the pull Chicago has over young people wanting to go to school, start their careers, and experience life in a big city. Rockford also competes with neighboring communities for development. Development pressure on greenfield sites has slowed noticeably in recent years, but the City still struggles to keep business from moving from the City to the newer buildings in the periphery.

IMAGINING
Rockford recently elected a young mayor, filled its city administer position with a long-time local urban planner, and has been filling key positions with fresh talent. Collectively, there is a push to renew the image of the City, to bring back young people who have moved away by supporting young entrepreneurs, advancing placemaking initiatives, and increasing housing and amenities downtown. All of these developments happened too recently to have been included in the City’s comprehensive plan and reveal how the City’s day-to-day operations and strategies differ from planning documents.

GROWTH
Every interviewee acknowledged that Rockford struggles to grow today and that the lack of growth hurts the City’s finances. The planning department has been hit particularly hard, losing 30% of its staff in recent years. The department “continues to do more with less” (Interviewee F, 2019). The explanations for population decline are myriad—there is no single reason. However, a common explanation was high property taxes—high tax burdens cause residents to leave for other states, especially nearby Wisconsin. Recent population losses have forced city leaders to question their assumptions about growth. The sentiment from current city leadership is that they are not going to take every development proposed with City—it needs to align with the City's values. “I think we understand that quality investment drives more investment,” said one interviewee (Interviewee F, 2019).

4.3.12 Conclusion – Rockford
The City of Rockford addresses urban decline with strategies that vacillate between countering shrinkage and accepting shrinkage, per Hospers (2014). The City emphasizes housing rehabilitation to improve neighborhoods by maintaining vulnerable housing and arresting depreciated housing values. City leadership understands that if Rockford’s population is to increase, it needs to make the City attractive for young people in addition to keeping residents from moving to the periphery or different states. To do this, the City is focusing revitalization efforts on its urban core, and testing people-based strategies such as Rockford Promise, which
provides full-tuition scholarships to a select number of graduates of Rockford public school system (Rockford Promise, 2019).

Like all cities studied, budgetary issues at the city-level have negatively affected Rockford’s planning department. In the wake of declining planning capacity, the City has had to adapt—it makes a concerted effort to engage residents in planning issues, attempting to capture and build social capital. The City employs tactical urbanism in the downtown and several neighborhoods as unique ways reevaluate both vacant land and public infrastructure. Many of these strategies are too recent to have been included in the City’s 2004 comprehensive plan and reveal how a different a city’s day-to-day planning practice can look from approved plans.
4.3.13 Latent Analysis – Springfield

Of the four plans studied, Springfield’s comprehensive plan is the most recent. Unlike the Decatur, Peoria, and Rockford, Springfield had never seen population loss until recently—it had only known population growth. Population decline was underway when the plan was drafted, but
it was new. Therefore, it was unlikely that the plan would address decline and shrinking more than the other plans studied.

The Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPC) prepared the plan for the City of Springfield. The SSCRPC is a separate entity from both the City of Springfield and Sangamon County. Through various agreements, it has completed planning work for the City since at least the early 1990s.

Upfront, the Springfield comprehensive plan adopts a pro-growth paradigm, stating “a well-developed comprehensive plan helps identify where and how a community’s growth needs will be met” (Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission, 2018, p.10). The plan’s primary function is to assist land use decisions.

Springfield’s aggressive annexation—more than doubling in size from 1950 to 1970—has allowed it to grow spatially, but has also “spread the city out and lowered population density” (Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission, 2018, p.19). The City is now 66.8 miles, 82% developed in some capacity. The plan notes that this spreading out has led to “declining tax bases in the inner city, enrollment drops in city schools, and financing and maintaining additional infrastructure” issues that are still problems today (p.19).

The plan problematizes recent sluggish population growth, suggesting slow growth will inhibit economic development, and the City needs to do what it can increase population. The plan includes improbably high population projections, considering recent growth trends discussed elsewhere in this paper. Two scenario studies projected 10.03% and 15% population growth by 2037 (see Figure 26). There are several reasons these population estimates are high. For one, the base numbers come from a 2004 plan, so they are further out of date than the plan might suggest.
Second, population decline is a recent phenomenon in Springfield—it is likely viewed as a temporary shift, adopting a stance that trivializes shrinkage. However, the plan acknowledges that the City’s demographics are shifting. The population is increasingly older retirees.

The plan remains open to changing city ordinances to allow different housing styles and mixes. Infill redevelopment is a recommended strategy, but areas for infill are broadly defined. It also suggests limiting land use changes in mostly residential areas. The plan itself is somewhat uneven in its support for compact development. In general, the plan suggests that to get commercial development and compactness residents want, and to overcome problems of sprawling out, it needs to be denser and focus development on the core.

Unlike Decatur, Peoria, and Rockford, Springfield has never had a large manufacturing industry. It is the seat of Illinois State government and state government workers are the majority of the local workforce. Springfield is also a regional medical destination, which adds diversity to its economy. Tourism also plays a significant role, as do conventions, due to state capital status and former home to U.S. President Abraham Lincoln. Therefore, the plan recommends medical services and heritage tourism as growth industries.
### 4.3.14 Manifest Analysis - Springfield

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Much like the previous three plans, “infrastructure” has a high occurrence rate. The plan commonly refers to the need for infrastructure to support future growth. It suggests that predicted...
growth would be slow enough that current infrastructure such as water and sewer lines will not need extending for a decade or more.

“Rehabilitation” and “renovation” strategies center on a property tax abatement for developers who want to rehabilitate old structures and do adaptive reuse (Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission, 2018, p.29). The plan also recommends relaxing zoning and building codes to facilitate said rehabilitation. The plan expresses concern for the City’s deteriorating housing stock, asserting it needs to “take measures to stop it” (p.58).

Finally, the Springfield comprehensive plan places heavy emphasis on conservation and protection of the natural environment, as well as an expanded trail and new linear park. However, the ideas do not connect to decline and shrinking.

REEVALUATING
The reevaluating strategies in Springfield’s comprehensive plan primarily address vacant land and propose a few novel ways to deal with the surplus. For example, this is the only plan studied that suggests establishing pocket parks on vacant lots (Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission, 2018, p.30). Importantly, the plan encourages infill development on vacant lots but also speaks generally about the importance of alternative land uses near and on the vacant lots. For example, the plan reflects: “a linear recreational space could raise the value for adjacent properties as well as make the area more enticing for home buyers” (p.58). More than other plan studied, the Springfield comprehensive plan alludes to (but never specifies) the potential of ecosystem services and recreational value of vacant land.

REORGANIZING
The Springfield comprehensive plan makes only general references to the planning process. Moreover, the plan rarely speaks about a competitive regional environment. There are several likely explanations. For one, the City and the County have a close relationship, insofar as the same entity—the Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission—coordinates their planning efforts. This long-term close relationship has likely tempered attitudes that might have otherwise enflamed regional competition.

Moreover, unlike Peoria and Rockford, Springfield is by far the largest city within its metropolitan region and has not lost population in proportion to the metropolitan region since at least 1970. Finally, Springfield’s population has increased every year until very recently. It stands to reason that Springfield is in the strongest economic position relative to its metropolitan area of any city in this study.

IMAGINING
Few mentions of the plan’s vision, “forging a new legacy,” relate directly to decline and shrinking. Where it does, the plan suggests a new legacy be built on the City’s cultural heritage. The plan allows no room to consider decline and shrinking have a part in Springfield’s future. The plan specifically states that the City of Springfield envisions growing, much like it has every
decade since its founding. Therefore, there are no references to envisioning new purposes or future beyond the status quo of population and economic growth.

Springfield is already well-known for its history and has a relatively large tourism economy relatively to similarly-sized cities in the state. The comprehensive plan makes clear there should be a concerted effort to update, but not overhaul, the City’s image. In this context, the updated image is a doubling-down on existing industries and assets, not a reimagining in light of a new demographic reality.

GROWTH
Again, the City of Springfield has only known population growth until relatively recently. The plan makes it clear that the City “chooses” to grow. It accepts growth as a given. The plan forces a stark dichotomy about the nature of cities, saying they “either grow or decline,” there is no in-between (Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission, 2018, p.26).

4.3.15 Interviews - Springfield

DECONSTRUCTING
Much like the Springfield comprehensive plan, interviewees spoke little about deconstructing techniques. For example, to them, there was no real pressure to downsize public infrastructure. However, some reevaluating techniques, such as the Ines Park Tax Increment Finance district described below, capture deconstructing techniques as well.

RE_EVALUATING
The workforce of Illinois State employees in Springfield has been shrinking for more than 15 years. A decrease in sales tax revenue has trended with the contraction of the Illinois State employee employment base, especially in downtown Springfield where many State offices are located. Springfield’s downtown is primarily office and retail. The City never had a large industrial base and thus no Warehouse District like Peoria where there is a conversion of industrial buildings to residential dwellings. An urban planner explained that office space is often difficult to convert to residential uses because of incompatible window sizes and ceiling heights, so office vacancies remain high even as the City wants to increase the residential mix of the downtown.

The City has found success elsewhere. The Ines Park Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district, located in the Ines Park neighborhood, has operated a land bank for several years. Money from the TIF has been used to match rehabilitation grants for exterior home improvements. There is up to $15,000 in matching funds available. The typical grant is $7-9,000 and most often used roof and siding repair. This program has stabilized the housing stock in Ines Park, though no new infill construction has yet occurred, according to one economic development professional (Interviewee I, 2019).

REORGANIZING
At the time of writing, the City of Springfield does not have an urban planner on staff, though many urban planning functions are still carried out within the City’s Planning and Economic Development department. An economic development professional explained that the City does a
lot of transportation and land-use planning work but not necessarily long-range planning. The Springfield-Sangamon County Regional Planning Commission (SSCRPS) completes much of the planmaking and analysis work at the behest of the City. This relationship has existed in some form since the early 1990s. One urban planner explained that this supra-organizational relationship allows for better regional coordination, as well as provides the City of Springfield access to more information and resources (e.g., data, scenario planning software) than they would otherwise have (Interviewee H, 2019).

IMAGINING

One way to induce people to imagine new futures is to show them what is possible. This feels especially important in Springfield because the ethos locally was described as “mediocre [design] is good enough” (Interviewee J, 2019). One planning professional recalled several occasions where local leaders were taken by bus to cities such as Indianapolis and Louisville, to see what these cities have accomplished with bicycle infrastructure, downtown revitalization, transit-oriented development and more.

GROWTH

Springfield’s population has been steadily rising for decades until as recently as 2010. As the State’s capital with many well-paid government jobs, the economy is relatively mixed and therefore has not suffered the kind of job losses that manufacturing cities such as Decatur, Peoria, and Rockford have in the wake of global economic restructuring.

Job loss has happened. Unlike a manufacturing city where a plant may shut down, displacing hundreds or thousands of workers at once, job loss at the State government has happened differently. From the early 1990s, offices have slowly decreased hiring, moved jobs to other parts of the state, or laid workers off in a slow-moving process of “job shed” that “nobody noticed,” according to one planner (Interviewee J, 2019). The City’s sizable medical industry offset some of the state government job losses, but not all.

Another slow-moving crisis in Springfield is the aging population. The problem was described by an urban planning professional: The City has a lot of retired and retiring people from the state government jobs. More than other cities in Illinois, retirees tend to stay in Springfield, in part because their families live there but also because the State of Illinois does not tax retirement benefits, so long as the person continues to live in the state. This aging population is a problem for the City because Illinois state law provides discounted property tax rates to people over 65. Thus, as more and more people cross that 65 years old threshold, city property taxes collections—a significant portion of revenue—will crash.

The pro-growth mentality in Springfield is unshakable. When asked about how the City’s comprehensive plan guides development, specifically in making decisions about greenlighting projects, one economic development professional admitted that there were no instances she could recall where those in charge looked to the comprehensive plan to approve or disapprove a proposed development. She explained that the mentality of the City is “we want growth” (Interviewee I, 2019). Another professional lamented the ineffectiveness of incentives to
encourage infill development. In his view, the development community will continue to do greenfield because it is both easier the develop, and it is what they know.

4.3.14 Conclusion – Springfield

More than any other city studied, Springfield holds the strongest economic position within its respective region, due in part to its seat as the capital of Illinois as well as past strategic annexations that allowed the City’s land area to grow substantially while adjacent communities remained small. Springfield also proves that regional planning and city planning can be effectively linked using novel agreements to share planning responsibilities.

Because Springfield’s population decline has so far been small and recent, the City has the best chance of maintaining its image as a growing city but also little incentive to reenvision itself. Decades of positive population growth have made leadership less like change course and adopt new strategies to address population loss that is undoubtedly happening today—and may happen more in the future. City leadership—and the plans that they reference—accept growth as a given. This path dependency can explain why local developers are “still using 1970s business plans” and why most local leaders overlooked the slow-moving process of “job shed” caused a contraction of City’s economic base and a surplus of vacant downtown offices (Interviewee J, 2019).
5.0 Discussion & Conclusion

5.1 Research Questions

Using four mid-sized cities in the State of Illinois, this research sought to answer the following three questions: 1) Are these cities shrinking, and if so, to what extent? 2) What are the implications of their shrinking? 3) What is the current planning discourse around population decline and shrinking in each city? The sections below address each question in order.

5.1.1 Are These Places Shrinking?

All cities in this study—Decatur, Peoria, Rockford, and Springfield—are experiencing population loss and some of the side-effects of urban decline. For Decatur, population loss has been a reality for decades. The City has lost a more than 23% of its population from its peak in 1970. Population trends suggest that Peoria and Rockford are experiencing their second wave of population loss in four decades, though Peoria’s total population loss is three times that of Rockford’s. For Springfield, population loss is less severe at less than 2% but more surprising because losses are happening for the first time in the City’s history. There is something different about today’s declining population compared to the past. The cycle of suburban growth at the expense of central city decline is broken. Today, all the cities studied and their respective metropolitan areas are shrinking simultaneously, signaling a new, troubling chapter in their growth trajectories.

That said, of the four cities, only Decatur lost more than 20% of its population from its peak. Both Rockford and Peoria have lost population only to gain it back in the following decade, with the assistance of annexation. Three of the cities—Peoria, Rockford, and Springfield—actually grew (slightly) from 2000–2010, though have shrunk since. Growth between 2000–2010 is a critical threshold as it suggests these cities “offer adequate economic opportunities and amenities to retain and attract residents” (Kodrzycki and Muñoz, 2014, p.89). That is to say, these cities are statistically more resilient to population loss that more rapidly declining places. This should signal to city leadership that the scales can tip toward resurgence, with the major caveat that local actions have limited power over global economic forces.

5.1.2 What Are the Implications?

All four cities showed common symptoms of U.S. metropolitan area growth—shrinking central city populations and robust growth at the periphery. However, the distribution of growth is different in each city. In Decatur, growth in surrounding small towns and unincorporated parts of Macon County happened in tandem with central city decline. This outward growth was comparatively limited because the region as a whole declined from 1980 onward. In Peoria, regional competition at the city and county level exacerbated population flight from Peoria to surrounding communities such as East Peoria, Dunlap, Washington, and elsewhere, which also
sucked up the vast majority of residential and commercial growth while Peoria suffered economic and population decline.

A similar trend occurred in Rockford, though its residential market was proffered up in the early 2000s by a rapidly rising housing market and proximity to Chicago. The market crash of 2008–2009 hit the City particularly hard. In Springfield, the City has long maintained a close relationship with Sangamon County and has always been by far the largest and most powerful city in its metropolitan area. Because of this and other factors, the City avoided population losses until relatively recently.

All four used their granted annexation powers to annex adjacent land and bring it under city management. However, the idea of “annexing a way to growth” obscures the problems of decline and shrinking, making it difficult for city leaders to problematize shrinkage.

All cities have suffered rising vacancies predominately for housing, but also industrial and commercial sites. Cities have adapted by employing unofficial and official land bank schemes in order to manage the demolition of uninhabitable buildings, take ownership of delinquent properties, and turn over or sell properties to residents and community groups willing to maintain them. However, the scale of abandoned homes far outpaces the cities’ abilities to demolish buildings and rebalancing housing supplies.

In Decatur, a local philanthropy has stepped in to provide additional funding for demolitions under the guise of neighborhood revitalization. In Rockford and Peoria, the city officials have relied on state and federal grants to fill funding gaps and pay for demolitions and industrial site remediation. Springfield, the strongest housing market in the study, has had success using Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to fund needed home improvements, effectively stopping homes from becoming uninhabitable and stabilizing neighborhoods in the process.

Regardless, each city has more vacant and derelict properties than it can possibly remove. Without a dramatically increased budget for demolitions and rehabilitations, the visual blight and safety concerns caused by abandoned structures will continue to plague these cities.

5.1.3 How Are They Talking About It?

Each of the four cities studied display a certain desperation for new development. The predominant tone of planning and development is pro-growth, where population decline is considered wholly negative. There was not a single example in the comprehensive plans or interviews were population decline was considered an opportunity.

Interestingly, nearly every professional that I interviewed expressed concerns with this persistent pro-growth paradigm. A few were complacent with the pro-growth attitudes expressed in the comprehensive plan, seemingly discouraged by a planning system that places so much decision-making power in the hands of untrained professionals (i.e., city councilmembers). However, the
majority believed that good design mattered, that infill development was preferable to growth at the periphery, and that city leaders needed better education on urban planning basics.

The majority of strategies employed by the four cities were countering measures, meant to stop urban decline and return the city to growth. Comprehensive plans described decline in neighborhood terms, not something plaguing the city as a whole. Thus, recommendations focused on dealing with decline at the neighborhood level (e.g., strategies for addressing vacant properties). A few of the plans expressed demographic challenges to the future growth potential, but all fell far short of sounding an alarm. Instead, every single plan projected future growth.

Several increasingly common strategies for addressing shrinkage were absent from comprehensive plans and interviews. For one, unlike in other cities that suffered severe population loss (e.g., Detroit and Buffalo), there is little to no discussion about reducing infrastructure or suggesting that existing infrastructure is overbuilt. In many cases, the comprehensive plans claim that infrastructure—water and sewer, specifically—is currently sufficient for future development within city boundaries. The plans characterize this extra infrastructure capacity as an asset, not a burden. Therefore, no proposals to downsize or decommission existing infrastructure in any of these cities were found, save public building conversions for private use (e.g., converting closed public schools to private apartments).

Each of these four cities has made some push toward the conservation of rural lands, especially for flood mitigation and water quality issues. However, the employment of green infrastructure is underappreciated and underutilized. Additionally, the comprehensive plans rarely if ever mentioned the reusing vacant spaces for temporary uses or ecosystems services. However, more recent planning efforts have taken a second look. Peoria’s solution for its Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) issues is the perfect example of utilizing the green infrastructure potential of vacant lots.

Path dependency provides one explanation of the current discourse: Path dependency of decision makers might explain the continued widening of roads, annexation of land, and belief that suburb expansion is the only way to “grow” a city’s population. For example, Springfield has only recently seen decline. Therefore, it is rational that city leadership see this current decline in population as an anomaly and ultimately reversible trend, despite some evidence to shrinkage being systemic.

5.2 Ideas from Other Cities

If cities are to respond effectively to population loss, the planner’s role must shift to “one that manages change, not just growth, and one that responds to and shapes forces that cause disinvestment and abandonment, not just the forces that fuel new development.” (Morrison et al., 2012, p.120). The issue for contemporary population loss is whether the planning profession can craft a realistic response to shrinking. In the case of these four cities—many of which are losing a population at a rate of half a percent per year—perhaps the best path forward is to follow the
advice of contemporary urban scholars and diversify their techniques, to use approaches crafted for shrinking places as well as those meant for growing places (Mallach et al., 2017, p.107).

The four cities studied are already doing this, to a degree, by tackling disinvestment in older historic neighborhoods, improving their downtowns, and trying to find their place in the “new economy.” Decatur’s ongoing revitalization strategy borrowed heavily from the City of New Orleans’ revitalization efforts post-Hurricane Katrina. Peoria and Rockford borrowed vacant lot maintenance strategies from Philadelphia and people-based “promise” programs from Kalamazoo, Michigan. Leaders from Springfield have toured larger cities like Louisville and Indianapolis to learn from their recent successful planning initiatives.

As the shrinking cities literature grows, so do the number of strategies for effectively combatting the adverse side effects of urban decline. The four cities studied have yet to try several strategies, some of which are listed below.

5.2.1 Rightsizing

As previously mentioned, rightsizing infrastructure is exceedingly tricky for cities to do, but removing or repurposing redundant infrastructure can be a cost-effective strategy in some instances. Akron, Ohio, a city that lost more than 30% of its population since 1960 (City of Akron, 2017) recently decommissioned a portion of highway Route 59 along the northern edge of its downtown, opening more than 20 acres of land for new development, parks, and other uses (Downtown Akron Partnership, 2018). Given the City’s more modest population size, city and regional leaders agreed to decommission the road and shift traffic to rebuilt parallel frontage streets. While city leaders decide the final fate of the highway’s right of way, the national Knight Foundation has partnered with local groups for creative interventions in the interim. In 2017, the Knight Foundation agreed to fund a “pop up” forest within the highway’s former alignment (City of Akron, 2017).

Other cities, not all of them shrinking, have taken similar steps to remove portions of federal and state highways that run through downtowns and dense urban neighborhoods. Syracuse, Rochester, Niagara Falls, and Buffalo, in New York all have ongoing highway removal projects. More than a dozen other localities are in the midst of their own highway removal efforts. Reasons for removal vary, though decisions often include considerations of life-cycle costs and the under-utilization of overbuilt infrastructure (Congress for the New Urbanism, 2019).

One-way to two-way street conversions are another rightsizing strategy that has proven effective in helping cities both reinvigorate their downtowns and reevaluate their transportation systems (Riggs and Appleyard, 2018). Cedar Rapids, Iowa—another “ordinary” city, according to Hollander’s (2018) typicality analysis—is converting its downtown street network back into a two-way network as a part of a broader revitalization strategy. Instead of converting all streets at once, the City has decided to convert streets back into two-way streets over five years, typically when they need resurfacing (Myers, 2019, May email, 2019). A local engineer explained that the purpose of the street conversions is “to create a vibrant and pedestrian-friendly downtown,” adding: “We have had a resurgence of development in the downtown. We have added more
residential housing in the downtown along with more development. We believe these improvements helped facilitate this growth” (Myers, 2019, email, 2019).

5.2.2 Temporary Use of Vacant Land

Strategies that deal with blight and the visible impacts of urban decline commonly prescribe variations on vacant land reallocation and sale (Németh and Langhorst, 2014; Schilling and Logan, 2008). Many of these strategies, such as adopt-a-lot programs, sideyard or side-lot transfers, active building demolitions, and community land banking, are already in use in some form in the cities studied (Németh and Langhorst, 2014, p.145-46). These tactics attempt to change the character or ownership of the land permanently, but there is also enormous potential in the temporary use of vacant land.

Madanipour (2017) describes temporary events hosted on vacant lands, such as pop-up parks and garden festivals, as “ephemeral landscapes.” Cities, developers, and agencies build ephemeral landscapes via short-term, small-scale actions taken cautiously in “a process of filling the gaps, waiting for recovery and experimenting with change” (Madanipour, 2017, p.796). This use of leftover lands from industrial loss and population shrinkage opens avenues for land experimentation. When successful, ephemeral landscapes helped catalyzed change and shift a city’s image away from the “decline” label (ibid).

Tactical Urbanism is the term more commonly used in the United States for a cadre of temporary alterations to the physical built environment. Tactical Urbanism is widespread today as a tool for both growing and declining cities (Jarvis, 2018; Lydon and Garcia, 2015), and the strategy underpins Rockford’s revitalization strategy. Tactical Urbanism has ecological, economic, social, and political benefits (Németh and Langhorst, 2014) and can help cities inculcate civic infrastructure by engaging citizens in public decision-making. (Jarvis, 2018; Kodrzycki and Muñoz, 2014).

In order for ephemeral landscapes and Tactical Urbanism to become widespread strategies for combatting urban decline, planning capacity either needs to increase or allow for and encourage more citizen-led efforts to take place, creating new opportunities for experimentation that could then lead to more permanent solutions (William & Bishop, 2012, p. 43). Moreover, cities need to address legal liability structures that enable conservatism in planning practice (Németh and Langhorst, 2014, p.147).

Ecosystem services, which are broadly speaking “the benefits people obtain from ecosystems” (Burkholder, 2012, p.1115), are another underutilized use of vacant lands in U.S. cities. These kinds of open spaces are often seen as a nuisance but have great potential to improve urban life by increasing biodiversity, improving air and water quality, creating aesthetically pleasing environments, and much more (Burkholder, 2012). Today, the most commonly employed ecosystem services are urban gardens and urban agriculture (Mallach, 2014b), yet numerous case studies show stormwater management is increasingly the most impactful, especially in cities with combined sewer systems (Burkholder, 2012, p.1160). Peoria is showing leadership on the ecosystem services approach through its stormwater utility to tackle problems caused by the
City’s combined stormwater overflow (CSO) system. In order to provide secure their numerous benefits, shrinking cities must make ecosystem services a policy priority (ibid).

5.2.3 Economic Ecology

Catherine Tumber, the author of Small, Gritty, and Green, convincingly argues that mid-sized cities with “manufacturing legacies and rich natural resources in farmland and water—combined with their smaller yet substantial urban markets” like ones studied in this thesis will be critical fixtures of a future green economy (Tumber, 2014, p.225). A vital component of the future green economy will be the use of abundant empty lots for the cultivation of local food, which can eliminate food deserts and improve food security in neighborhoods that desperately need it (ibid.) Extensive, contiguous vacant land can also be planted as urban forests that help sequester carbon emissions (Großman et al., 1995; Haase, 2013).

Another vital component of the future green economy will be renewable energy. The adjacent open agricultural land and vacant in-city land can be used simultaneously to produce renewable energy locally, adding “profit for individual farmers and local economies alike” (Tumber, 2014, p.229). Studies show that such a turn is not far off. The State of Illinois has increased subsidies for solar energy in recent years, a sector that is expected to grow 1,700% by 2024 (Solar Energy Industries Association, 2019).

5.3 Future Research

Using four mid-sized cities in the State of Illinois, this study adds to the growing body of shrinking cities research in the United States. It answers the call of numerous shrinking cities researchers asking for broader perspectives and additional case studies that extend beyond frequently studied shrinking cities. It confirms statements about how many cities in western democracies respond to changing economic conditions and urban shrinkage: with a combination of pro-growth economic development strategies and “strategies dealing with the social and physical consequences of shrinkage” (Haase, 2013, p.269). This study also confirms that there are significant limitations to using content analysis to understand a city’s planning system (Norton, 2008), in part because cities craft policies and programs for strategic purposes that need not require a plan, and in fact, may be hindered by the planning process (Wiechmann, 2008).

This study also suggests that behaviors and attitudes around issues of urban decline and shrinkage are indeed evolving. The unique responses of each city to new economic and demographic realities make for interesting further study. Regarding the spatial implications of decline, future research should focus on the impact that a changing retail landscape has on shrinking cities. To do this, one would need to know the extent of retail contraction, the physical footprint of the retail sector, and the various roles retail plays in a community—tax base, neighborhood anchor, job generator—and search for relationships. Not all of this data is readily available and would need to be patched together from different data sources and likely, aerial and on-the-ground fieldwork. The question of retail contraction, or shrinkage, is imperative to the shrinking cities discussion because the loss of sales and properties taxes negatively impacts city
budgets. As this research has shown, budget cuts have cascading effects on a city’s ability to effectively address urban decline.

Another area of further study should address the impacts of land-use patterns on long-term economic resilience. Each comprehensive plan studied favored compact, infill development but most also supported greenfield development in the periphery. Many interviewees that I spoke with lamented that greenfield development had exacerbated urban decline. Incentives and policies are needed to make infill more attractive to developers and greenfield less so, but this idea is politically unpopular currently. One city, Peoria, has tried to question these assumptions by helping fund a study of on the return on investment of different land-uses locally. So far, the impact this study has had on the political discourse of future growth is unclear.

These four cities would benefit from research that examines the city-specific trade-offs of infill versus greenfield (or sprawl) development on long-term fiscal health. Studies in other parts of the county have shown enormous loss of city revenue because of the dispersion of jobs and housing in low-density, sprawling development. Low-density development has had the effect of eliminating economic development in larger cities (Downs, 1999; Nelson et al., 2014). For example, a study found that sprawl development along highway beltways have cost Kansas City and San Antonio around $2 billion each in 2012 dollars, as several thousand jobs (Nelson et al., 2014, p.303). There is a growing sense that cities are missing out on the benefits of denser, compact living (ibid). Some shrinking cities researchers hope that that compact living “will experience a renaissance under conditions of shrinkage” because of the economic, social, and ecological benefits associated with higher densities (Schiller, 2007, p.8). However, there is currently limited conversation, and even hostility, around the economic-maximizing benefits of denser development in the four cities studied, which is why more research is needed.

The appeal of studying the four cities in this thesis is their ordinariness, a quality they share with more than one hundred other “ordinary” cities across the United States. Future research that aims to understand how “ordinary” cities like Decatur, Peoria, Rockford, and Springfield cope with ongoing economic and demographic changes can help researchers understand dozens of other ordinary cities and create a shareable network of policies and practices that can help them address, and possibly reverse, the ill-effects of urban shrinkage.
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Appendix A

Decatur

Interview A

1) Can you talk about the City’s Revitalization Strategy and what it entails? Does it include reuse of brownfield sites?
2) How does the City work with the region, on regional planning issues?
3) The loss of industry has been devastating for Decatur as well as other Illinois cities. What about retail and service sector today?
4) What are limiting factors to implementing the revitalization strategy?
5) Can you speak to any strategies (not already discussed) that the City uses to address its challenges and changing economy?

Interview B

1) Can you talk about the City’s Revitalization Strategy and what it entails? Does it include reuse of brownfield sites?
2) How does the City work with the region, on regional planning issues?
3) The loss of industry has been devastating for Decatur as well as other Illinois cities. What about retail and service sector today?
4) What are limiting factors to implementing the revitalization strategy?
5) Can you speak to any strategies (not already discussed) that the city uses to address its challenges and changing economy?

Peoria

Interview C

1) Where does the Innovation Team sit with the City’s planning structure and local government?
2) What is the core mission of the i-team?
3) What projects has the Innovation Team addressed thus far, and why these?
4) What has been the result of bringing in outside speakers and groups like the Incremental Development Alliance and Urban3 to Peoria? What has been the reception?
5) What strategies have you undertaken that you would recommend for similar cities in Illinois and Midwest?
6) But what has been the effect on local planning efforts for pushing an “innovative” approach?
7) How do you change minds? E.g. Outside speakers, study trips, media, etc.

Interview D
1) What happened with the Heart of Peoria Plan? I read that it was only ever adopted “in principle.” What does that mean?
2) Can you discuss the difficulties of “strategically plan for future development and redevelopment”, as mentioned in the Grow Peoria comprehensive plan?
3) What were the reasons and impacts of departmental consolidation at the City-level?
4) What is the role of “code-enforcement actions” for managing properties, keeping them properly maintained? And how as enforcement changed in recent years?
5) Can you talk about ways your department has made development easier?
6) Regional planning seems problematic at times in Peoria, considering the difficulty of planning with between several overlapping governments. Can you talk about this as well as how regional competition plays out?

Interview E

1) Can you speak to how the City’s budget difficulties have impacted economic development efforts and efforts to innovate in the region? E.g. long-term vs. short-term thinking.
2) Regarding the economic development/return-on-investment conversation: What do you think has worked or is working in Peoria, what has been the approach so far, especially as it relates to the City’s core and historic neighborhoods?
3) What are the barriers you have experienced to regional planning and intergovernmental communication? E.g. competition with other cities for economic development dollars or regional competition.
4) What strategies have you undertaken that you would recommend for similar cities in Illinois and Midwest?
5) How do you change minds? How do you get decision-makers to pay attention to these issues?

Rockford

Interview F

1) The recent TLC Plan/Downtown Strategic Action Plan for Rockford underscores the importance of being strategic and “testing” things out. What has been the reaction to this plan, and why is it important in Rockford?
2) Can you unpack how Rockford’s geographic position impacts planning in the city (for example, it is the closest of the four cities to both Chicago and another state)? What does it mean for the availability of housing today?
3) What can be attributed to downtown Rockford’s recent renaissance?
4) Where does the City focus its efforts to address blight and housing vacancies?
5) What is the role of the city administrator in carrying out urban planning strategies?
6) How does the city budget connect to urban planning? And how do decision-makers (e.g., council and mayor) understand these connections?
Interview G

1) The Rockford comprehensive plan makes several references to return (and analysis) on investment in infrastructure decisions. Does this kind of analysis happen? If so, what does the process look like?
2) Have you seen a decrease in greenfield development in recent years? If so, what are the suspected causes?
3) Has the recent TLC Plan/Downtown Strategic Action Plan for Rockford changed perceptions? If so, how?
4) How and where does your department focus revitalization efforts? E.g., boarding up abandoned buildings, building inspections, demolitions.
5) What, if anything, is the City doing to reduce barriers to redevelopment?
6) What is the current economic development model used in Rockford?

Springfield

Interview H

1) What is the role of transportation in revitalization and redevelopment in Springfield?
2) How important is growth to the City of Springfield and the region? What does growth mean (e.g., population only, jobs, new businesses, etc.)?
3) How rigorous is the “cycle cost assessment” that determines what parcels should be developed?
4) Recent trends reveal that the City and County are losing population. This contrasts with the comprehensive plan’s scenarios and the community’s desire to grow. What has been the discussion around recent population decline? For example, is there a need to reprioritize strategies in the comprehensive plan?
5) How is fiscal responsibility of a project calculated?

Interview I

1) Can you speak to the balance of the need for jobs and the provision of amenities that may attract younger people to stay or move to Springfield?
2) Does the City have programs to incentivize redevelopment of greyfield sites vs. building on greenfield? If not, is this something the city is exploring?
3) Has your department made or considering changes to city code to encourage infill development?
4) Recent trends reveal that the City and County are losing population. This contrasts with the comprehensive plan’s scenarios and the community’s desire to grow. What has been
the discussion around recent population decline? For example, is there a need to reprioritize strategies in the comprehensive plan?
5) How is fiscal responsibility of a project calculated?

**Interview J**

1) Can you explain how planning with the City of Springfield and the working relationship with Regional Commission?
2) How important is growth to the City of Springfield and the region? What does growth mean (e.g., population only, jobs, new businesses, etc.)? Can you point to possible reasons for recent decline?
3) How rigorous is the “cycle cost assessment” that determines what parcels should be developed?
4) Is there competition between regional entities for development? If so, how does it play out?
5) Recent trends reveal that the City and County are losing population. This contrasts with the comprehensive plan’s scenarios and the community’s desire to grow. What has been the discussion around recent population decline? For example, is there a need to reprioritize strategies in the comprehensive plan?
6) What is the rationale for decision-making for new development in the City? Do decisions get made with reference to the comprehensive plan?