

Chapter 50

Shrinkage of Rural Areas as a Result of Urbanization and Migration Processes in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

The study of tendencies in economic and environmental shrinkage is tied to the expressions of substantive changes in complexity of determinant contexts of internal and migration flows. This chapter answers the challenges posed by economic tendencies, using the theories and models and does not fall victim to simplistic projections and conjectures and theories based more in speculation than in fact. The method used is the critical analysis of economic, social, and political tendencies in relation to the situation of shrinking cities in Mexico. The results of this analysis led to the finding that the shrinkage process in Mexico, as a developing economy, does not follow the same patterns of well-developed countries, and an increase in shrinking cities has occurred since the middle of the 1950s and the use of incentives in some localities to attract economic growth have had modest success in turning around the shrinking process.

INTRODUCTION

The study and research on shrinking cities is a new field in Mexico. Research in the topic of shrinking cities in México is often criticized for lacking theoretical foundations or for insufficient reference to theory to explain the findings from empirical studies. This paper is aimed to address this criticism.

The issue of shrinking and decline in population and economic prowess provokes always reactions due to political sensitivity. In general terms, shrinkage is only one side of the coin, being growth the other one. Mexican researchers and academics are more worried on the fast growing rate of population and its spatial and territorial implications. While the more advanced and post industrial economies of the world are thinking in how to turn around city shrinkage into a steady growth, less developed economies are worrying in the implications of the urban fast growing rate of population and its territorial redistribution to stabilize development.

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Shrinkage of Rural Areas

Maybe it is necessary to develop shrinkage typology to better characterize the phenomena. One point is important to stress here. While in the advanced countries are talking about the shrinkage process as the result of post industrial, post modern development, here in México where the industrialization process is still initiating, the process is taking place due to other causes, such as the most urgent drive of people for survival.

In general terms, the situation of shrinking cities in México does not follow the same patterns of well developed countries, where an increase in shrinking cities occurs since the middle of the 1950s (Oswalt, 2005) and the use of incentives in some localities to attract economic growth have had modest success to turn around the shrinking process

The concept of urban development is the way to analyze relationships between society, nature and progress and their representations in socioeconomic and political terms. The idea of progress is basic to understand and assess the different elements of contemporary society through different theories of development, from lineal development of Rostow to theories of Zero growth.

There are a variation of conceptual and theoretical proposals to analyze the decline and shrinking of human settlements: flows, decisions, phases, stages and composition of migration (Tuirán et al., 2000:31; Brown, 1991) sometimes inserted in evolutionist schemas, theories about the phases of economic development or social modernization that leads to an urban transition and mobility models based on a pioneering trajectory. Of course, these evolutionary schemes do not have a general applicability because in some cases are related only to determined movements such as exchanges between regions, urban and rural zones, and intra urban, between center and periphery in metropolitan areas, etc.

The study of tendencies in economic and environmental shrinkage is tied to the expressions of substantive changes in the complexity of determinant contexts of internal and migration flows. Population mobility is the strategic rational response of survival in an instable economic, social and political environment. At the same time, it is important to analyze the tendencies according to the economic changes using the theories and models and not to fall down victim of simplistic projections and conjectures or resound theories based more in speculation than in facts.

Over all, the determinant factors of shrinkage are suffering mutations as the result of the new economics and the emergence of new forms of population mobility. The base of these changes in Mexico is the economic liberalization and structural adjustment programs, the increasing capital mobility, major requests and demands from the labor market, advances in telecommunications and transport, productivity conversion, increasing of export activities, comparative advantages and relocation of industrial activities.

An approximation to the most classic analysis of shrinkage and its coverage allows that any theory can operate under its logic. The clue is the fact that factors can be attributes of the spatial areas which are interpreted over a common base by the agents. Although originally were close the gravitational approaches which depended of migration flows of distance and population of localities and communities, rapidly the attraction and expulsion factors widen and start to include economic, social, environmental and political factors.

MACROECONOMIC THEORY

From a macroeconomic perspective, economic shrinkage is analyzed according to its functions in the economic system in which it occurs. Macroeconomics and neo-classical models explain the shrinkage decision as a cost-benefit calculation (Davis, Stecklov & Winters, 2002, p. 292). The classic economic

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