



Thought Leader Summary

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Driven by simultaneous, disruptive processes of migration, economic readjustment and demographic change, cities in the US and Europe have undergone a profound transformation since the end of World War II. In the course of that transformation, many cities have begun a process of rebuilding themselves by finding new economic roles and reconfiguring their physical form, while at the same time, other cities have declined. Even in more successful cities, however, regeneration has been inconsistent, affecting different places and different sectors of the population unevenly, leaving many of the cities' residents behind. A host of challenges face cities as they try to reconfigure their physical form to reflect their post-industrial realities.

Economic change

The deindustrialization of cities and nations in the US and Europe has powerfully affected those nations' cities; cities historically dependent on manufacturing, such as Pittsburgh, Essen or Manchester, have seen not only their large-scale heavy industries such as steel, coal or automobiles, but much smaller-scale manufacturing, largely disappear. These industries not only provided the jobs for the city's population, but occupied large parts of each city's land mass. In Bethlehem PA, the now-closed steel works took up 20 percent of that city's area. These cities have been left not only with large-scale unemployment, but with the vast physical residue of industrialization.

Demographic change

Populations in the US and Europe are changing, with growing numbers of elderly households and single young people, and fewer married couples raising children, the demographic group for which most neighborhoods in American cities were built. A deep and growing mismatch between the housing supply and the emerging demand has emerged in many of those cities. Immigration has transformed many parts of many cities both in Europe and the US, but its effects have been spatially and economically uneven. Many cities, particularly those that have seen little immigration, like Detroit or St Louis, have seen their population dramatically decline.

Industrial legacy

Deindustrialization has left older cities with vast expanses of factories, rail yards, slag heaps and other residues of their industrial legacy. Finding new uses for these relics of industrial history, and turning them from a burden on taxpayers to assets for post-industrial cities, is very much a work in progress. While cities like Pittsburgh, or entire regions like the Ruhr Valley, can point to notable successes

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in reusing their industrial legacy, how to convert the large vacant and often contaminated industrial areas that still exist in even the most successful cities and regions into productive uses remains a daunting challenge for local officials and NGOs.

Vacant land and buildings

De-industrialization, particularly when combined with population loss, has created a new landscape of vacant land and buildings in many older cities, ranging from scattered vacant houses in otherwise still-vital neighborhoods to entire streets and blocks, forming a new urban 'prairie'. While some vacant buildings can be reused, often for new and different uses, and some vacant land redeveloped, the fundamental, long-term imbalance of supply and demand in many cities dictates that large numbers of vacant buildings may have to be demolished and that new 'green' uses, such as agriculture, reforestation, stormwater retention, and the like will have to be found for urban land, either as temporary or long-term uses.

City Centers

City centers or downtowns are the poster children of urban regeneration. While many cities have lost many of the central economic functions that once sustained their downtowns, a new generation looking for high-density, walkable environments has been turning these areas, along with many areas adjacent to major universities and medical centers, into their cities' newest, most dynamic mixed use neighborhoods. This transformation reflects both the growth and residential preferences of young well-educated singles and childless couples, the growth of jobs demanding university educations and specialized skills, and the density and strong physical 'bones' of these areas. Building on the revitalization of these areas, and extending the benefits of downtown revitalization to the rest of the city, will be a continuing challenge.

Neighborhoods

Nearly all the land mass of cities in the US and UK is made up of residential neighborhoods historically developed with single family houses and designed to accommodate married couples raising children. Many neighborhoods have already been disinvested beyond the point of no return, and far more are at risk of future deterioration than can expect future gentrification or regrowth, while downtown regeneration has shown few spillover benefits beyond a few areas immediately adjacent to city centers. With the neighborhoods' traditional demographic shrinking, the two-fold challenge is how to rebuild demand for these areas in ways that can sustain or recapture their historic vitality, and create opportunities for their residents in the growth economic sectors of the city and region.

The overarching challenge facing post-industrial cities is how to reconfigure their physical form in tandem with the effort to reposition these cities in the global economy around new models of economic revitalization, while doing so in a fashion that the entire city and its residents benefit from change, rather than leading to a 'bipolar' city, in which a few areas grow and thrive, while much of the remainder of the city continues to decline.