



54ème colloque  
**ASRDLF**

5-7 juillet 2017, Athènes, Grèce



15th conference  
**ERSA-GR**



Les défis de développement pour les villes et les régions dans une Europe en mutation

## European small cities and towns: a territorial contextualization of vulnerable demographic situations

**Mme Anne BRETAGNOLLE**

UMR Géographie-cités Professeur  
Equipe PARIS 13 rue du Four 75006 Paris France  
anne.bretagnolle@parisgeo.cnrs.fr

**Mme Marianne GUEROIS**

Université Paris Diderot Directrice-adjointe de RIATE et Maitre de Conférence Paris  
Diderot  
RIATE Université Paris Diderot 8 place Paul Ricoeur 75013 Paris France  
mguerois@yahoo.fr

**Mr Antonin PAVARD**

Géomaticien indépendant Ingénieur géomatique  
1 rue Paul Niclausse 77100 Meaux France  
ant.pavard@gmail.com

### Référence à la session / reference to the session

B6 Tendances démographiques

### Résumé / Summary

Unlike in North American countries, only a slight majority of European inhabitants live in cities and towns (58% according to our databases) but nearly half in small ones, i.e. of between 10 000 and 50 000 inhabitants. The density of small cities and towns in Europe is the result of a long-standing urban pattern that was established mainly in the late Middle Ages. Whereas European planning policies focus mainly on large urban functional areas, we assume that they should pay more attention to these small cities and towns, especially when these are located far from metropolitan regions and are facing demographic challenges such as aging and/or population loss.

On the bases of harmonised datasets that cover 29 European countries, we suggest the importance of studying urban agglomerations rather than metropolitan areas, in considering to its full extent the large heterogeneity of small cities and towns in Europe. We started from a harmonized urban database, originally defined in 2004 by the European Environment Agency from CORINE Land Cover images and continuous built-up areas criteria (Milego 2007) and enriched in the framework of ESPON DATABASE 2007-2013 (Guérois et al. 2012). There are 4304 UMZ larger than 10 000 inhabitants, among them 3421 are less than

50 000 inhabitants, and some of them lay inside regions lacking in any functional urban area defined from Eurostat (New Larger Urban Zone, Dijkstra and Poelman 2012). We defined small cities and towns as UMZ populated between 10 000 and 50 000 inhabitants.

We first constructed a multi-scalar urban-rural typology that describes the relative situation of small UMZ in 2001 according to seven settlement contexts, the two extremes being “remote rural area” and “region dominated by a large metropolis” (Bretagnolle et al. 2014).

These settlement contexts are then crossed with demographic indicators. We first considered age structure in 2001 and enlighten 260 small cities characterized by ageing profiles and rural isolation, with a concentration in Sweden, central France and central Italy but also in Finland, Central Europe, Spain and Portugal. The SIRE database’s lack of economic variables or other demographic indicators such as migratory and natural balance had led us to question the attractiveness of a city through another dimension, i.e. the evolution of its total population over a substantial period of time, between 1981 and 2011. We found 304 small cities characterized by constant population losses over the three last decades: mapping these results showed a major concentration of these cities in Germany and France, but they were also present in Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy and Sweden.

By combining those three dimensions, we finally identified the most problematic situations, i.e. small cities located in rural areas and characterized by population loss and ageing profiles. The total number of such cities is only 50, in other words less than 2% of the European cities and towns. However, they are located in one third of the European countries, and when considering the number of affected regions (NUTs 3), they represent not less than 10% of the French “départements”, 15% of the Hungarian “megyek” and the major part of the Swedish “län”.

Keywords: Europe, small cities and towns, urban-rural typology, age structure, demographic decline.

## **Bibliographie / Bibliography**

Bretagnolle A., Guérois M., Pavard A., Gourdon P., Zdanowska N., Lizzi L. (2016) Demographical Trajectories of European urban areas (1961-2011). Final report of the TRADEVE project, University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 87 pages, freely available <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01311420>

Bretagnolle A., Guérois M., Mathian H., Pavard A. (2014), UMZ: a data base now operational for urban studies (M4D improvements). Technical report, 30 June 2014, downloadable from ESPON Database website.

Cunningham-Sabot E., Fol S. 2009, Shrinking Cities in France and Great Britain: A Silent Process? in K. Pallagst et al. (eds), *The Future of Shrinking Cities: Problems, Patterns and Strategies of Urban Transformation in a Global Context*, Berkeley CA: University of California at Berkeley, 24-35.

Deas I., Hincke S. 2014, Migration, Mobility and the Role of European Cities and Regions in Redistributing Population, *European Planning Studies*, 22(12):2561-2583.

Dijkstra L., Poelman H. (2012), Cities in Europe. The new OECD-EC definition. *Regional Focus*, RF 01/2012, Regional and Urban Policy, 15 pages.

European Union (2011), *Cities of tomorrow. Challenges, visions, ways forward*. European Commission, Directorate General for Regional Policy, ISBN: 978-92-79-21307-6.

Guérois M., Bretagnolle A., Giraud T., Mathian H. (2012), "A new database for the cities of Europe? Urban Morphological Zones (CLC2000) confronted to three national databases of urban agglomerations (Denmark, France Sweden)", *Environment and Planning B*, 39 (3):439-458.

Hoekveld J. (2014), Understanding Spatial Differentiation in Urban Decline Levels, *European Planning Studies* 22(2): 362-382.

Mayer, H., Knox, P. (2010). Small-Town Sustainability: Prospects in the Second Modernity. *European Planning Studies*, 18(10), pp. 1545–1565

Parr J. B. 2014, The Regional Economy, Spatial Structure and Regional Urban Systems, *Regional Studies*, 48:12, 1926-1938.

Turok I., Mykhnenko V. (2007), “The trajectories of European Cities, 1960-2005”, in *Cities*, vol. 24 n°3, pp.165-182.

Weichmann T., Bontje M. (2015), Responding to Tough Times: Policy and Planning Strategies in Shrinking Cities, *European Planning Studies* 23(1):1-11.