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Handlungsansätze für Kommunen im demographischen Wandel

Summary

For some time now, the effects of demographic change have captured German media attention and been observed above all in the country's cities and communities. The changes underway differ from region to region, with growing communities often bordering directly those that are shrinking. Until 2008, population growth in more than one-half of the nearly 3,000 German municipalities (with more than 5,000 residents) examined here was relatively stable; just over 30 percent of these municipalities were showing a decline in their population.

By the year 2030, Germany's total population will shrink by 3.7 percent. This equals more than three million people, or the current combined populations of Hamburg and Munich. This also means that over the next two decades, more than 62 percent of Germany's cities and communities will face a minimum three percent decline in their population. In addition, by 2030, every second person in Germany will be over 49 years of age; in 2009, the so-called median age was only 44. But age structures, that is the relative share of young people, potential workers and young families, differ considerably from region to region in Germany.

Politicians, administrators and other decision-makers face a daunting task in handling the increasing complexity of challenges while addressing the wide range and interdependencies of influencing factors comprehensively. Drawing on the available information, they must make decisions that take future developments into account.

These challenges inform the typology of communities in Germany with resident populations of more than 5,000 that are presented here. Evaluating cities and communities in terms of their future development or viability is not the key goal. The point, rather, is to provide specific, data-driven examples of interdependencies and thereby mitigate complexity. The typology of communities is based on multivariate data collected by the Community Roadmap (Wegweiser Kommune) project.

Nearly 3,000 communities in Germany were grouped into nine different demographic classifications in order to allow for the smallest possible differences between communities within a specific classification and the greatest possible differences between the nine classifications. Each group was examined in terms of its specific characteristics, challenges and potentials. Once these nine demographic classifications were established, action strategies appropriate for each were developed. These strategies are designed to facilitate further analysis and help communities in developing and defining lines of action appropriate to their needs.

The online database www.wegweiser-kommune.de offers analyses of each classification that include practical examples of specific themes. Demographic change is clearly not an exclusively German phenomenon. Increasing age expectancies combined with falling birth rates across the European Union are driving up the average age of the EU population. According to current EU and UN projections, several countries and regions

in Europe and across the globe must prepare for the effects of declining populations that are growing older. Developing effective strategies for handling these demographic, economic and physical changes while planning small (in number) but liveable cities are among the greatest urban challenges facing Europe. Therefore, at the end of this publication, we take a look at the European COST Action "Cities Regrowing Smaller – Knowledge on Regeneration Strategies in Shrinking Cities across Europe" (CIRES). Here, more than 60 scholars from 26 European countries examine shrinking processes in cities across Europe, identify and address examples of good practices, and develop a conceptual framework for future research on shrinking cities.

Independent of their size and current situation, all communities must face increasing competition for residents, jobs and quality living conditions. Aiming to support efforts already underway in communities, this publication brings together differentiated analyses and a variety of strategies for action in addressing the megatrend of demographic change. A broad range of information on demographic change in all districts, cities and municipalities in Germany that have more than 5,000 residents can be found at www.wegweiser-kommune. de. For each community, the project's database contains data on more than 200 socioeconomic indicators, population and long-term care projections through 2030, as well as suggested actions and examples of good practices that can foster and inform a variety of planning processes.