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Population decline and infrastructure: The case of the German water supply system

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Abstract

The dynamic interaction between population and water is usually discussed in the context of development issues in Third World countries, but rarely analysed for northern, industrialised countries. Nevertheless, the improvement of a supply system's ability to adapt to demographic changes poses challenges for industrialised countries as well, and generating knowledge for developing adequate solutions also implies new, intriguing tasks for demography. This article analyses the relationships between population decline and water infrastructure using Germany as a case study. After sketching the development of the debate on the correlation between population and problems of water supply, the most relevant demographic factors affecting the water infrastructure are described in general. The authors then identify the implications of demographic change for water demand and use on the one hand, and the resulting effects on technical networks and their economic basis on the other. Finally, approaches for solving the problems and possibilities for taking action are discussed.

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