The history of modern urban planning is intimately bound up with the issue of urban expansion. Drawing from a toolbox that includes forms – grids, axes, rings, wedges – development rights and forms of building taxation, urban planners have proposed growth models for urban areas where it has been necessary to organize spatially the increase in productive activities and operators, to create new districts for new residents, to increase public amenities and infrastructure.

But the history of our cities has not always coincided with a history of linear growth. Rather, it has been an alternation of growth and decline phases, concentration and dispersion of population, expansion and abandonment of urban areas, as shown by the de-industrialization cycle that has affected many European cities in the second half of the twentieth century. It is for this reason – and even more so today, in the context of contemporary demographic and economic trends – that planners must spatially organize a series of dynamics that move in the direction opposite to those that were traditionally the preconditions of planning.

The seminar conducts critical reflection on the relationship between urban planning and shrinkage by assessing some of the key positions that have been taken up in the debate and some tools – plans and projects – which have been developed to manage the shrinking of built space in urban and territorial situations characterized by conditions of economic and demographic decline.