

IMPORTANT POINTS OF BROWNFIELD REVITALIZATION

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Summary

This contribution focuses on brownfield revitalization as an effective reuse of land, which has been already developed, and which bears traces of people's activity, cultural and industrial heritage. It explains important part of public sector, mainly municipalities and local authorities, in the development of the issue. Furthermore, foreign approach examples are mentioned, which could bring inspiration into Czech conditions.

Keywords: brownfields, brownfield revitalization, urban development, industrial heritage

1 Introduction

Brownfields are mostly regarded to be a negative or even a pejorative appellation. Czech urban planning avoids this term to prevent concerned estates from devaluation. Commonly accepted fact is that brownfields constitutes a barrier of urban development, both material and social. Unfortunately, people living in the area impacted by this issue, do not realize the problem in full extent, when they live there too long. It could be explained so, that they get used to it. However, brownfields are a problem, which needs to be solved.

On the other hand, professionals consider brownfields to be a neglected resource of land inside the city. Land is one of limited resources and the land, which has been used already and is currently lying by, is convenient for reuse (to save greenfields). In addition to that, brownfields offer a scope for public spaces, as these estates has low building density in compression to a down town, where they are usually located.

2 Systematic and complex approach to brownfield issue

2.1 Public sector initiative

Although brownfield revitalization obviously is a public interest, there is still lack of initiative from public sector, primarily municipalities and local authorities in Czech Republic. There are lots of foreign experiences, which could be recast to strategy applicable to Czech conditions. Some of these experiences show that activities organized on local level lead to positive development of the situation, because there is no all-purpose solution for brownfield issue.

Another important point is public sector initiatives, which will attract citizens on one side and private investors on the other side. These initiatives mean to invest public money, so the investments should be primarily in favour of citizens. They could be realized via

building the urban infrastructure, mainly public transport. The initiatives could be head to creating public facilities, such as city library, municipality seat or state university campus – a sample project. The same importance is credited to initiatives to educate or to popularize positive aspects of brownfields revitalization, such as ecological and social benefits, industrial heritage, genius loci etc.

2.2 Long-term strategies

Foreign experiences, as e.g. Emscher Park project (IBA '99), also show that task of revitalization is “a long-distance run”. Sometimes, it takes ten and more years to find an appropriate content and investor. Sometimes, the brownfield is strategic for urban development and any private investments and activities are not desirable. This implies that it requires a long-term strategy and the best way to perform it is to incorporate it into a regional plan. However, the question arises, how to incorporate it.

As mentioned above, it could take a long time to find an appropriate utilization for a particular brownfield, and during the time the area is lying by and decaying. This situation can be avoided, if there is the public initiative. Swiss example shows that the brownfield areas could be open to public, even though buildings are empty, without any content. The areas are formed to create public spaces and parks, places to meet and to spend leisure time. There is also a possibility of temporary use, like cultural occasions, programs for children and youths etc., that could be organized in case of money scarcity. In Switzerland, there are even examples of municipality initiatives while the production is only running down [1]. It sounds very simply, but it has a hidden conflict. The conflict lies in property conditions – any estate has an owner and the owner is private in most cases in Czech Republic. And forming public spaces on private property is almost impossible. On the other hand, opening the areas for public means that citizens are close to the process of revitalization/conversion and they are more agreeable to accept it.



Fig. 1 Public space of MFO Park, Oerlikon (former machine works), Zurich, Switzerland

2.3 Industrial heritage value

Among all embedded values of brownfields, industrial heritage plays an important count. Industrial heritage as a part of cultural values of present society is connected only to some of brownfields; however it is not opportunely utilized. As any other heritage, it could be handled many ways, but the most effective and beneficial is an adaptive reuse, so-called conversion. Considering industrial heritage value, it is necessary to warn of misuse as a coulisse or as an advertising catchword. However, this misuse is more rewarding than to destroy it irrecoverably.

When talking about industrial heritage, it does not mean just technical monuments, but also objects which are not provided with heritage protection on national level, as e.g. churches, castles or chateaus, which results in either misuse mentioned above or pitiful state of buildings, as any maintenance work cannot be required by law. This could be partly solved on local level, borrowing Polish example. That is to say the second level of heritage protection – heritage list, which is connected to a regional plan. Its validity depends on a regional plan and it swells a heritage register administered by Ministry of Culture [2]. Rules for buildings listed on local level are of course “weaker” then for those in heritage register. In spite of that, this system has one major advantage in choosing buildings to provide special treatment in local context and considering urban development.

Various possibilities of heritage protection drive at few questions: Who should decide or choose? What is worth protection and how to protect it? What is strategic for urban development? And if something does not seem to be valuable now, will it be perceived the same by next generation?



Fig. 2 Sydhavnen (former docks), Copenhagen, Denmark

3 Conclusions

Waving aside missing legislation, insufficient economic motivation of investors and general public (un)awareness, which are regarded as obvious part of solution for brownfields issue, other needed steps of development of this issue in Czech conditions should be mentioned here. Information currently play one of most important part. It means to create one unified, regularly revised, national brownfield database, as e.g. British NULD (National Land Use Database). Brownfields classification according to a development potential [3] should then provide useful information to all the interested parties. Finally, urban planning potential in this issue has not definitely been fully exhausted yet.

References

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This research has been supported by grant of GA ČR 103/09/H095 „Sustainable Construction of Buildings and Sustainable Development of Urban Space”.